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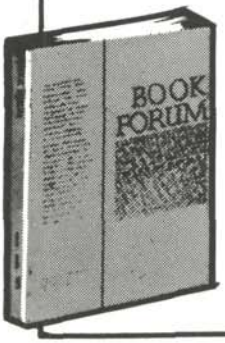

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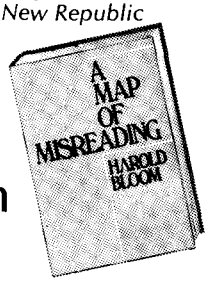

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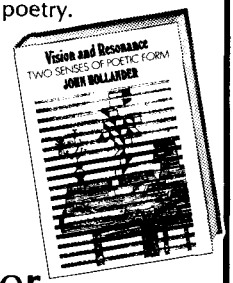

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NOTES

WILLIAM GASS teaches philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis, while writing "long articles and small fictions" . . . **NORMAN BIRNBAUM** will be at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton next year. . . . Professor of History at the University of Rochester, **CHRISTOPHER LASCH's** most recent book is **The World of Nations**. He is now working on a sociological and historical study of the family, which is due to be published in the fall of 1976. . . . **JULIET MITCHELL** lives in London and is currently training at the Institute of Psycho-Analysis there. She is the author of **Women's Estate** and **Psychoanalysis and Feminism**. . . . **Tales Told of the Fathers** is **JOHN HOLLANDER's** latest collection of poems. His book on poetic form, **Vision and Resonance**, was also just published, and a new book, **Reflections on Espionage**, will be brought out next year. . . . **DOUGLAS CRASE** was formerly speechwriter for Sander Levin, twice-unsuccessful Democratic candidate for governor of Michigan. He is also the author of the 1969 **Report** of the Democrats' political reform commission in Michigan. . . . **KENNETH KOCH** has just published a book of poems, **The Art of Love**, and a novel, **The Red Robins**. He'll be on leave from Columbia University this next year, which he'll spend in Venice and Paris. . . . Winner of the Frank O'Hara Award for his collection of poems, **Domes**, **JOHN KOETHE's** most recent collection of poetry is **A Long Lesson**. He is an assistant professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. . . . **KATE FARRELL** is a student at Columbia University. . . . Born in Montevideo, Uruguay, **ROBERTO ECHAVARREN** has published mainly in Spanish. He currently lives in New York and teaches Latin American literature at York College. . . . **KENWARD ELMSLIE** lives in the wilds of northern Vermont, where he tends his garden (celtuce, cress, fava beans), plays tennis, and edits Z press books. His most recent works are a novel, **The Orchid Stories**, and an opera libretto, **The Seagull**. A collection of his poems, **Tropicalism**, will be published this fall. . . . Born in Brooklyn, **DAVID SCHLOSS** now lives in Cincinnati and teaches poetry writing at Miami University (Oxford, Ohio). His books of poems include **The Beloved** and the forthcoming **Lazarus**. . . . **A. J. LIEHM** is teaching at Queens College, CUNY. . . . **EDITH KURZWEIL** teaches sociology at Montclair State College and is working on a book about French social thought. . . . Associate professor of English at Yale, **DAVID THORBURN** is the author of **Conrad's Romanticism** and co-editor (with Geoffrey Hartman) of **Romanticism: Vistas, Instance, Continuities**. . . . After a year in England, **NEIL SCHMITZ** is back teaching at the State University of New York in Buffalo, while at work on a book on Whitman. . . . **RONALD CHRIST** teaches English at Livingston College and is currently translating Borges' early film criticism. . . . **GILBERT SORRENTINO** has received a CAPS Fellowship for 1974-75. . . . Associate professor of English at the University of Iowa, **DONALD MARSHALL** studied philosophy in Paris under an NEH fellowship in 1973-74.

The poems for this issue were chosen by John Ashbery.

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POINTS AFTER . . .

SOLZHENITSYN. Some great figures become leaders, others become symbols. Solzhenitsyn, for example, has sounded like the leader of a crusade against the Soviet regime, mobilizing all the forces that are or pretend to be for the restoration of civil liberties and intellectual freedom in the Soviet Union; but in the extremity of his position he has come to symbolize the confusion and the impotence of the opposition to totalitarian rule in Russia.

Most of what Solzhenitsyn says about the Soviet Union and about the United States is true, and his boldness is refreshing in pointing out that American foreign policy is being dictated not by considerations of democracy or even of national interest but rather of immediate profits. But, unfortunately, Solzhenitsyn reduces all political questions to a power struggle between the West and the East, which is neither sound nor productive. For it means that in every situation, short of nuclear war, where the issues are political not military, the odds are in favor of the Russians and the official Communist parties.

Solzhenitsyn's position is basically that of the conservative anti-Communists, whose politics boil down to supporting the status quo—ideologically and militarily—against both the real and imagined threat of Communism, even though it has been demonstrated over and over again that it is precisely disaffection with the corruption and weakness of the status quo that the Communists exploit everywhere. And it also has been demonstrated repeatedly that only a left opposition, one with a vision of a better society, can cope with the combination of terror and hope that is the unique offering of the Communists. Unfortunately, however, the left opposition is tiny and powerless—except, perhaps, in Portugal—and is hemmed in on one side by the anti-Communists of the right, who further help to confuse the issue by lumping all left groupings with the Communists, and on the other by the mass of soft-headed idealists who have been brainwashed into thinking that all criticism of Russia, China, the Third World politicians, or the Arab demagogues is reactionary.

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Solzhenitsyn's dramatic part in this political configuration was quite movingly demonstrated at the AFL-CIO reception for him in Washington, D.C.; and my own feelings were quite mixed not only about this fiery, bearded figure, almost literally resurrected from the slave labor camps of Siberia, but also about the assembly of anti-Communists who had come to cheer him. One had to be stirred by his passionate indictment not only of the Soviet Union but of this country, at the same time that one was put off by his deep-rooted conservatism and old-Russian religiosity, that, as Mary McCarthy pointed out in a review of *August 1914*, suggests all kinds of nostalgias and affinities with Tsarist Russia. Inevitably he reminded one of Dostoyevsky whose reactionary politics served extraordinary powers of relating human and social forces. And in the end, I suppose, Solzhenitsyn like Dostoyevsky will be honored for his political spirit and his literary talents, and not for his ideology.

The makeup of the audience also brought home our political dilemmas. My sense of it was that it was made up mostly of old-line trade unionists and socialists, who had remembered the anti-Communism better than the socialism of their youth, with some conservative politicians, and a sprinkling of writers like myself, who believed in enough of what Solzhenitsyn stood for and came for what promised to be an historic event. It was a one-sided gathering; and I never thought I could be so nostalgic for the "united front" of the old days—however demagogic that slogan usually was, and the strange company it brought together.

ISRAEL. The increasingly popular game of intellectuals accusing each other of treason has only added to the intellectual confusion. Still, one must point out another shocking instance in the failure of the left to protest the current ideological crusade against Israel, which is a product of the alliance between big business, the underdeveloped countries, and the Communists. Indeed, liberals as well as radicals are implicated by their idealization of the cause of the Palestinians and, generally, by their acceptance of the myth that all nationalisms, all backward countries, all minorities, especially if they are anti-American, are honorary members of the socialist tradition and hence can be assumed always to be on the right side. Thus, the idea of socialism has been reduced to any cause supported by the Communists and opposed by America, while Israel has been converted by incessant propaganda into an outpost of imperialism. As Trotsky once remarked, it would be easy to be a Marxist if all one had to do was to find out what the reactionary press said and then come out for the opposite. The only trouble is that in this case the lines are not clear, for the American government is also going out of its way to appease the Arabs (in a perverse denial of long-term national interests) because of the short-term interests of the business community.

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LIBERATION. Another scandalous instance of political mindlessness and fragmentation is the acquiescence in a resolution denouncing Israel by the delegates to the U.N. convention of women in Mexico City. One would have thought that the very idea of liberation would have led them to walk out of a meeting manipulated by political forces not known for their feminism. Instead, they came back all buoyed up by the triumph of sisterhood and solidarity at the conference. Perhaps the main lesson of such a performance is that liberation from thinking—even in the interest of solidarity—does not advance any kind of political or human liberation, particularly since solidarity was suspended in the treatment of Leah Rabin. As Marx might have said: The liberators need to be liberated.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS. The Birnbaum-Lasch dialogue in this issue presents a number of interesting questions, which we hope will stimulate *further thinking about our political and intellectual plight. But it is also a sad* reminder that as the questions become more urgent we seem to be further away from the answers. This is certainly a remarkable historical situation: one in which we have no reasonable explanation of the economic crisis, of our political predicaments, of the cultural chaos, nor any sense of where we are headed—not to speak of answers or solutions. It is as though generalizations had been banned and a resolution passed to avoid theorizing about any subject or issue or making any political and cultural connections. How else explain the almost complete turn to professional specialization of the period we have just come through? It would appear that whatever intellectual energy has been available has been used up by the liberation movements, which, themselves, have been becoming both narrower and more modish. It would seem that the style of our thinking is being affected by the media, with their cult of the "fact" and their premium on lightness, casualness, sensationalism, mass appeal, avoidance of too much theory or speculation—all adding up to a capacity for instant replay. It is ironic that Daniel Bell's end of ideology, by which he meant the end of radical ideology, should have turned out to be literally true.

W.P.

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STORIES

William Gass

I WISH YOU WOULDN'T

Mr. Hess said, his hat turning slowly between his knees. His wife lay sick in a chair, quite silent. Mr. Hess was leaning forward, his weight on his forearms, hat hanging from the pads of his fingers, carpet across his eyes. Um, he thought. Aah. His wife tipped back in the lounger, rigid as always, her risen feet in a V. Mr. Hess, however, sagged in contrast, his whole weight pressing against his thighs above his knees, brown hat dangling between his trousers. His missus stretched out staring at the ceiling in order not to see, and he couldn't endure that either. The canary, or whatever the hell it was, rattled its beak and then shrieked . . . shrieked and rattled its beak. Hess moved his shoes to stand inside the florals. The venetian blinds were scratched, though you couldn't see the scratches in the shade they threw. Their shadows simply said how crookedly the slats hung. What to do? although the question required no answer, hurrying after itself with furthermore of itself like a second hand. He had sucked the center from that old cliché: *and time lay heavy on his hands*. Dust sank through the light to snow his shoes—the air so thick, the fall so fast—while whatever it was—canary bird, cuckoo—rapped its beak along the bars till Hess remembered boyhood pleasures too . . . with a pang like the smart of a stick. What? what? what to do? Thin tan lines flew parallels inside his suit no matter how he moved, but his wife could barely stretch herself about her bones. Mr. Hess was afraid she had cancer—something, at any rate, lingering and serious. Her skin was a poor color and she was wasted as an ad for famines. Maybe her mind had been affected by the

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illness, too; that would explain the peculiarities of her behavior. Change of life, he'd heard, often did them funny. He felt that he should get her to a doctor. A doctor—he pendulumed his hat—a doctor, yes, that was his duty. The doctor would report upon her. Smiling gently, rimless-eyed, he'd write her up as dying. Then he'd instruct Mr. Hess in the society of symptoms which his wife's disease had founded. They always turn queer in a case like this, the doctor would say; oh they go strange, sometimes very early. We suspect, the doctor would say—my science does, you understand—that there's a kind of signal to the future in it. Poor things, he'd say, they're done for from the first: an abnormal placenta, don't you see, pressure from a pelvis that's too small, or some slight chemical disturbance, sudden stress, internal turbulence or organ tumble, a quiet slow infection, and it's all over: *sizz-z-z-z* until the air's out; so don't heavy your head any further with it, Mr. Hess, don't dent your hair, not even by a hat's weight, none of it's your doing, she was born at half eleven in her life . . . chew this bit of candy here to sweeten up your teeth, possess yourself in patience . . . death should follow shortly now, though her soul can only seep away, not fly, it has so little stamina. You've no young children, I suppose, Hess, have you? and I trust you're well insured. Ha ha, Mr. Hess thought. Ha ha. And he solemnly prayed for his wife's demise. Too weary for hate or even malice, he certainly didn't feel ashamed; foreign, rather, to remorse or any sorrow. She was sick enough to be lots better dead. That was a fact, god's truth. Hess wished her speedy passage o'er the great divide as he wished, weekends, for green golfing weather. It was reflexive, a wish as mild and futile as it was heartfelt and desperate, because he'd given up golf, as he'd given up bowling. Laid to rest, he'd want the shoveling ceremony, please, run through just once again. The disappearance of her bier beneath the earth was a constant longing like the thirsty for another dram. His hat dropped softly to the carpet, quashing an edge. He slid his right arm forward to recover it. Only a doctor, only a definite "soon she must die," could give him hope, for his own heaviness was overcoming him. Every day he hung a little lower on himself. It grew more difficult to rise in the morning, lift himself from chairs or slide from cars, even stir at all, accomplish stairs or carry any trifling action to completion, and the blood which fell out of his heart was siphoned back painfully. But she would never submit herself to

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any sort of physical examination. It was inconceivable. She knew she had a body of extraordinary kind, and that strange gray oblong organs would be discovered swimming like sea animals in the plate of the X ray. No . . . he had to be satisfied, since it was always possible that the doctor might frighten her off from the brink of her death with a knife or a needle, whereas her present ill health, so hopefully plain, though he only conjectured it, advanced with a steadiness no one as deeply concerned as he could fail to appreciate. He would accept the uncertainty. Mr. Hess knew no more of the spirit than his hat did—that is, not directly; and if his flesh seemed to be sliding slowly from him like thick batter or a heavy syrup, it did not make his bones more saintly. Nevertheless it was that realm, mysterious in its work as magnets, and moving always out of sight and underground like rivers of electricity, which was the source of his dismay and the cause of his anguish. He did feel that with ingenious instruments it probably could be seen, in some way metered or its passage mapped, for this invisible world in which his wife lived made her weary; the stream she swam in was perhaps impalpable, but it left her damp; indeed, there were times when Mr. Hess sensed, somehow, the current flowing, and knew that sallow as her skin looked, lifeless as she seemed flung down on a couch or discarded in a chair like emptied clothing, she was lit up inside and burning brightly like a lamp. Even so, the only lamp he knew which fit his image of her was the sort which smoked above a poker table; surely she had no sky inside herself to fall from, no ceiling fixture, ceiling chain, or wire burning like a worm. She had her distances, all right, but within was their one direction, and Mr. Hess could not help but wonder once again exactly why he was sitting where he was; how it had happened to him, so bodily a being, even if he were a bit baggy and had all those habits she disapproved of in her subtle aerial way, never saying a word, just exuding an odor like ripe cheese when he appeared, causing the temperature and light to alter, holding up time so that it seemed he'd been picking his nose forever, or simply sending a sigh through the house like a breeze; how had it happened he should be so fastened to this—this twig, he sometimes thought in those moments when the past seemed as though it had held a promise and he'd once been a blossom, then a fruit, full of juice and flavor; how had it happened to him? prisoners must say that, over and over, he thought, handcuffed, chained, shit, Christ even thought it, as he was

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hanging there, nailed; but Mr. Hess had no head for searches, he could scarcely find his slippers, answers were out of the question, as his wife said sometimes, no, only these same wonderments circled through him, wooden in their wheeling as a roundabout. I've got to slow down, Mr. Hess thought. He ran along paths in the carpet, in the tan, around the turns of leaves and flowers. She hasn't enough blood in the narrow channels of her flesh to pink a tear, while mine is like sand in a sand-clock, almost wholly in my head—thick, moist, flushed, hot—or in my feet—heavy, old, cold, quiet—awaiting the tipsy-turvy to trickle out, thus I alternate a lot, don't I? she's not the only one whose spirit's like electric current, but alas I've none of the instant capacity of wires. Hang in there, anyhow, Hess. Hang in. But she was having her weirds now, the stiffish kind, and he wished she wouldn't. He could hit her again, of course. He could always do that. Instead he groaned and tried to spin his hat upon his finger. She was ill. She was dying. So he hoped. But she didn't have to tell fortunes. She didn't have to sit in the kitchen with the cards spread out, absorbed by the tale they were telling, bad news for Edgar, when he came home. She didn't have to leave the house to squat on the front step, in the drive, where he would find her making noises like a key-wound engine. Nor did she have to disgrace his needs, throwing up her skirt quite suddenly to leave him thunderstruck. I'll be needing lawyers, if I'm not careful. Not so heavy with the fall of the fists, Hess, hey? he cautioned himself. No so quick with the kick. When the jury learns what you've been through, Mr. Hess, don't worry, they will give you sympathy; they'll put her beaten body behind bars; they'll hiss when she is carried through the court. You've heard of the victimless crime, Hess, haven't you? Well, there are crimeless victims, too. You're one of them—one of those. What's a paltry kick compared to the piteous smiles she's inflicted on you, the looks thrown heavenward with such aboriginal skill and cunning with curves they stone down later in your living room the whole naked length of a sofa-soft Sunday afternoon, passing through the shield of the Sunday paper, bruising your eyes; or the little whimpering moues which cower in the corner of her mouth, how about those? the glances which scuttle away like bugs to the baseboard to wait the night, all the tiny gnawing things she keeps about her: frightened knees and elbows, two flabs of breast with timorous nips, disjointed nose, latched eyes? There are laws against that, Mr. Hess, unwritten laws, the laws of

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common decency, laws of the spirit and the soul, what she knew best, Hess, didn't she? sure, her silences, for instance, are against the law, silence is against the law, silences are blows, and you can plead self-defense, you can plead extenuation, you can argue quite agreeably that you were driven to extremes, out of reason as out of town, by all those occasions when she struck you with inwardness—oh—witholding is wicked, refusing to respond, that's malice, Hess, you have every excuse, don't worry your warts, and when the jury hears how you have borne yourself these long weary dreadful, ladensomely heavy years, they'll set you free to cheers and to the sound of bells, though it'll help your case if you don't have young children, Mr. Hess, you haven't have you? that's best. Ha ha, Mr. Hess thought. Ha ha. Please to observe, Mr. Hess, now, that she isn't dead. She's having one of her little nervous spells, a little dab of the dizzies, so she's resting, that's all, she's merely unmoving, stiff and staring, eyes wide as a picture window, watching god knows what going on on the screen of the ceiling, some soap opera of the soul, a few new developments in the Grand Design, I shouldn't wonder—ha, Mr. Hess, hey? ha—no, it's just another quietly ordinary sagamuffin Sunday in the Hess household, and you're no stranger to it, sweat it out the same as always, lean on your knees till your thighs dent, you know how it goes, you know the routine—oh my goodness, what's to be done, Hess, what's to be done? His urine fell out of him as out of a nozzleless hose, while she was forever listening . . . listening . . . in constantly alert and continuously expectant receivership, so to speak, like a line of ears for early warning. *Pamphila.* Faugh. What's done is done; then done, it's done, and then it's done. So why wait any longer? when every act is over and we're filing out. Anyway . . . my wife, to picture paths and patterns in resting rocks, deep tides of feeling, vast programs of action . . . well, she became positively seismographic, and registered dirt in huge mud-bound hunks roundly wibble-slob-wobbling like a dancer's tum. Wait? Thin ass on a fat chance. Run? She said she heard his grass and claimed it was up to no good and had ungracious plans. What could he do but close his hands? She'd pick up stray transmissions even in the splash of his pee, the hum of motors, the surreptitious click of switches. Everything which entered the house, whether from above or below ground, entered her . . . entered without knocking: the wind, of course, and the rustle of leaves, sunfall as

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noisy as Niagara, day-mist and light spatter, they were welcome as Holy Water because she sensed the presence of the Sacred Word in bird whistle, rain plop—noises natural and noises not—squirrel chatter, pipe rattle, buzz, bloom, shadow; she parsed them all as easily as he read Dick and Jane—St. Francis couldn't hold a sparrow to her—and she had for each of this world's blurts a warm greeting, not for him, though, just for the holing of moles and earth-eating worms, just for the paths, traps, and caches of beetles and spiders, for ants, wasps, cicadas—veterans as jovial in their cosy halls of relaxation as members of the American Legion. She'd have an immediate sympathy for the growth of roots, too, Hess was prepared to bet, their efforts, the energy, life's task, how it was . . . like fingers struggling into gloves. It was a contradiction he couldn't countenance or fathom, because for all her foreknowledge, he still had to yoo-hoo when he came round a corner, and without that cheerful next door warning, or the boop-boop-boop of a rubber horn he'd filched from the handlebars of a neighbor tike's bike—ha, oh lord, ha ha, ha ha—she'd startle like a sparkler, burn with indignation briefly, and darken on the wire. Otherwise she was stoical. She was patient. Rapt, she waited for erosion, rust, chip, flake, craze, settle, since slowness didn't faze her, accumulations of the gradual, the thick that gets there bit by bit the way fog sags in a hollow, little reiterations, all the overtold anecdotes of the actual, same upon same, she said, were satisfying, though her face did not betray her pleasure, if, in fact, she felt some, giving away only what a dial would, so he sometimes knew where his wife was tuned without any sense for the source or substance of the signal, and because she was a stranger to class and its consequent snobbery, she listened equally to gravel scatter or the incontinent wetting of basement walls. The further within she went, the more numerous the noises, an orchestra hot for its A couldn't compete for cacophany, and they delivered her news as diverse as the dailies. To tap drip, naturally, she bowed like a rod; to knuckle pop and cloth scrape, she was a wand . . . how do you stand it, Hess often said, with so much going on, if it's as you say, and there are vibrations in ethers as yet unimagined, sounds exceeding sound even in the customary shoe squeak and silk slither, or from drapes, morose and heavy, hanging in a skin of dust, there comes the prolonged metal shudder of a gong? Of course, it's only me who has the wonder, and who am I—so dull, so down; but I think it's

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remarkable that you should be responsive to the low moan of cushions; if you ask me, it's even suspicious how warmly you are washed by every slow hydraulic sigh released by grease racks, barber chairs and door stops; strange that you are passionately moved—imagine—by the yearn of warping boards, the tireless cries of wood rot, thin as thread and exquisitely tangled, but perhaps it's that sadistic element in you which appreciates broken slats and tacks like teeth, screws, nails, staples with their twin penetration like the drilled wounds of eyes, the elongating pains of picture wire, the screams of burning bulbs, and although in your overburdened state it may be kind of you to regret the steady dampening of salt on humid days, still, one need not be a queen and have a palace to enjoy the sweet granular silence of sugar in its crock. Voices: they were everywhere around her like gnats. In snowfall, frost. He had his hat. To rise? to doff one final time? good day, Madame—good-by, surprise— . . . to leave? He could do that. Run under it out of the rain. How many of his dreams had flight and freedom in them? Ham and eggs. Pie and cheese. Muff and sniff. She'd hear the Southern slurs of melting custard and be . . . entranced. He had his hat. He could do that. But noises he made deliberately to set her off, stomps around the room or weights he placed on the floor to make it groan, soda he shook and swallowed, screws he gave an extra turn to, fists he left printed in the air, the pounding he gave the coverlet, or conversely the squeaks he silenced with sewing machine oil, the jars he swaddled in socks, the lids he glued or the many things he simply removed in the trunk of their car to cast on the dump or drop in a lake or bury: none of these acts moved her because, she said, under torture matter could be made to say anything. Mud, mold, matter—what one called it didn't count—but it had neither courage, nor loyalty, nor conscience. In her husband's police chief state matter would moisten its tongue for its own ass, and she didn't believe that right, she refused absolutely to consider it, matter alone meant nothing, a calf of slime, she said, not an object of thought, of piety or speech; it was a convenient carrier at best, a carton for cats, and so she thought of it the way typhoid must have thought of Mary, no more, not even as a necessary ambience or elevation or so much as a stand for music, pediment for a statue or tower with an aerial, though that was closer, and what was he, then, in his dense maleness, a series of surfaces like a stack of plates, what was he with his bowling and his beer and his business—

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charging the living for their life and paying off only when death was a winner—what was he with his busy pencil and greedy teeth, in the flesh of his flesh, but the purest muck, individuation driven to the point of indifference, asafetida not energy, sheer dumb disagreeable stuff, unworked, unrealized, raw, foolish in its lean and teeter, its oils, wows, and ouches, as an Evereadied dolly, yet with a prick which led him on his little trot through life like a leash held at the loop end in the Pope's fist? Butterflies leave laces in the air like a courtier's cuffs, she said. Faugh. Easy to say such, harder to prove so. Still, in order not to shit, she would refuse to eat—intolerable the sounds of devoured food: unfeathered, fried, carved, bitten, chewed—therefore why was his pissing so productive? How about a belch, he'd ask her, much message in that? How about a fart? What can you read in a sneeze or the ooze of sweat, that collar of water on the toilet pipe—ha—what do you say?—what about the petulent whine and then the frightened whinny of laboring machines? leap of light from a mirror? unkinking cock? but she would smile her sad peacemaker's smile at his coarseness, face him with a calm forbearing palm, explain that only the plainest idea could be contained in such a short intemperate sound as a sneeze, bereft of feeling and every fineness, say how often there'd be but blunt sense in the sharpest signal, because you never can tell about such things, Edgar, you must know that by now, surely you do, you do, surely, and though paint slides from a brush sometimes in a way that's purely meditative, never mind, I have heard hush! in the batter of hammers, the clatter of cans, and please in the rasp of a file. I know every letter of the law, Hess said: L . . . A . . . —and I know of the awe in it, was her reply. It helped her to hit her, Hess knew that. Surely he knew that. Who had his hat? She hadn't his hat. He had his hat. She wanted hitting in the worst way, although her surrender to his will was like another conquest of China. Still, what did it matter whether she was out from a blow or lost in her dizzy mind's movies, since she could easily have dreams during dinner, trances during a doze? There was no place or moment she was willing to occupy the way Hess took over his air and hours—fully, heavily, persistently—so he was unable to feel there were any outlines to her—no weights, no volumes, no shifts—she was never anywhere. His wife might undergo visions while steaming a crease in his office trousers, plume out a chimney and disappear, receive visitations washing dishes, her thin hands gloved in suds as

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delicate as underclothes, or entertain omens and other astral submissions as though they were coffees set out in kitchens, as though one's daughter or less likely one's son had come home from a party and wanted to talk and you had perhaps pie and a bit of cheese to go along with the midnight signs and ciphers, the symbols and the codes, while you listened numbly dumbly to the life you'd passed by years ago like some display in a window turntabled once again—turntabled—ha—ha ha—and your daughter or less likely your son awkwardly dancing to it as if it were a new tune and not a revival routinely fiddled by Old Bones and his Big Band. Ha, Mr. Hess thought. Ha ha. Articles in attics: so much for her visions. Voices spoke to him too, spoke to Hess, nicknouned the Hessian by his mates—ha—ha ha—they spoke to him from out of the past as hers did out of walls, because—it was true—what has gone before goes before like a hound, peeing a path, and damn if the old days didn't dump on her, she was no different for all her fancies, because Hess knew from his own bitter history, hers too, that when today caught up with yesterday they would call it tomorrow. Visions, she said. Voices. Faugh. He had cause: cause like cotten is the cause of wounds. Blah. He knew. He had grounds. But his eyes did not step from the carpet where they were confined by stems and leaves to little curlicues. There was no need to look. Even if the room changed around him, it would be the same to his shoulders. I have cause, good cause, for what I do. My god, I've grounds, grounds like this floor here, concrete covered with fur, and beneath that earth forever and the few pipes we shit through. Listen, Father, I have cause. I do what I have to, always with cause, good cause, and only when I have to, only with cause. I've *grounds*. That's why I wait/wait till I have to/to do what I have to . . . do. I wait while the years pile up and cause after cause comes like snow in a storm, so that now I may have too many, grounds too great like a park around a puddle, because they get suspicious if you have too many, they suspect that if you have too many, you haven't any, and oh god, Father, I have many—many, many—still . . . . not too many, just enough, although they may say what are these causes which never effect? what is this mass which never moves? but I have many—many, many, many—and who can blame me if I run past complaint now as if it were a STOP I hadn't seen? Visions. Indeed. Faugh. Blah.

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Visions of what, though? Never of gods and goddesses, never any angels, scarcely a cupid, not a single streak of light like the sperm of a star to pierce some window to where she was sitting, not Fate or a Fury or a vampirish mouse with a flat furry face like Bela Lugosi . . . nobodies, every one, not a name among them, not an old demon even, out of work or with an odd hour off and able to visit. No. Faugh. Nooooh-bodies. The walls stood up around him, tan as a turkey, and the ceiling smirched along overhead as though in a day it might rain. It must be tiring to stay that stiff, he thought, for she wasn't dead, that would be restful, the stiffness, the silence, of death. This was tense, this was a bellow, a hugh howl which steadily grew and now contained the room which contained them. Father, she's all right. I mean, she's sick, and her soul is like a Cape Cod shingle, but she's all right. Never could detect a pulse. That's normal. Arm like a dry vine climbing her trunk. Normal. Chest as still as a stove top. Fire's out. Sick, then. Normal. She's all right. Voices, she said. Messages. All right, messages: blah, what were they? what did they come to? sniffles and yipes from *Little Orphan Annie*, whining about lost dogs, weeping because there were boys away in the war, anxieties about men: boorish insensitive husbands like himself, brutal brothers, inconstant companions, faithless friends, lying lovers—bitching, bemoaning—nothing that came out of the great gentle richness and happiness of life, nothing about the sweet thunder of the pins or the excitement of a homer, the comforting closure of a jaw in a bun—so—so much for the spiritual telegraph, for ESP, because only diseases sent messages of any length and complexity—moment by moment readings, hourly bulletins, daily summaries, weekly releases—every sickness seemed to be somehow a triumph of the spirit, especially stopped-up sinuses, and migraines, like static on the radio, headaches so electric they halo'd your hair, and it completely flummoxed Mr. Hess who held his own head and groaned, even whimpered, while his missus felt giddy, had a spell of dizziness, or fell softly to the floor in a faint the way clothes slide sometimes from a hanger. Then there were discharges, menstrual moans, and the whites like a fog of sound. Mr. Hess hated to think about the others and couldn't—didn't dare—ask, nevertheless what he gathered was that the ethereal world his wife loved was nothing but the loathsomely oozy body done into jiggles and jogs like the huff and puff of someone running. The books he consulted agreed in substance,

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though seldom in detail: it was a school of the dance, vibrations in vapors or ripples around rocks; it was streaks in cloth, they said; it was speeding clocks; it was clouds in chambers, ozone after lightning; it was wow, ow, ouch; it was apples on vacation from their cores. And the things in nature which proved most mute were therefore most sound, were in equipoise and balance like the billiard before its score, so equal and so uniform it was impossible to guess where a lean might come from or what tilt it might topple toward. Scrape, scratch, rasp: it was this inefficiency, this illness, this grumble in the works, which caused the uproar—indigestion, for instance, arthritis, epilepsy, ulcer—so that Hess felt sometimes that if the world would fall silent, she would be silenced. The hope led him to let his watch stop, although she said it kept on keeping time, and this was yet another reason why he double-washered taps, over oiled hinges, smothered the sharpener, and carried things out of the house tightly wrapped. He had long since ceased to smoke because Ella complained of the foggy swowl in every draw, the ploan like a stormhorn in every puff. Now he went to the garage to grind his teeth. If you're all so big about the Spirit, Ella, he said, why are you all so physical, hey? why so gut and head sick, so eager to hear the earth? and why are you each so ugly: you're either flat-faced or fat, thin-haired or moppy, lime-lipped, gum-gray, the teeth spilled in your mouth like a damp pan of beans, not elegant, not opulent, not delicate, not shy, no ma'am, rather wart-, wen-, and liver-spotted, vein-roped, yeah, albino-eyed, allergic, snivel-nerved and pukey, with tits loose and shriveled as emptied balloons, man-oh-man, or melted and sloping, uddery, why? drunk on disapproval, are you? and is every pain a blessing like a boy scout's badge for merit? proud—I guess so—vain as if you were a Beauty, spoiled in the same way as a Jewish Princess, still I wonder how you came to be so fuckless if so female, hey? so juiceless, dry as oatmeal overboiled, oh even your stout ones like Madame Betz have dustbowls standing in their bellies, even in July when every skin is slithery, cunts closed and lying buried in their sweaty secret hair like clams in silt, hey? and you have the gall to despise me for guzzling beer at the ballpark and playing with my toes. It was the only time Ella had ever raised her fist against him, and hadn't he fetched her a good one, but there's really no use talking to her, Father, to hammer some sense, because she won't listen to me. She hears muscles jumping in my jaw; she will hear a hair gray, milli-

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inch by milli-inch; she covers her ears when the belly rumbles; she listens to my face flush and moistens her brow with a cloth; frequently she sings along: she hears all this, each secret part and public parcel, but she won't pay any mind to *me*. Father, Mr. Hess said seriously, I have cause to believe she's committed adultery with a drainpipe. Well she raised her fist that solitary time and said something overgrand and stucco like a thirties theatre. It was really rather remarkable, come to consider it, how she seemed to gather the pieces together, various panels of her clothing, a collar, a pocket, a sleeve, each moving as separately as ants yet together like clasp and tie, too, all soft and bony at the same time, the way a scarecrow would grow if it grew, and her mouth opening, wider than when a muffin entered or a triangle of toast, and the muscles tensing along the length of her neck, the veins enlarged, quite blue, and the cry coming slowly out atop her tongue, in scraps, in flecks, the way she'd risen from the floor—Ayeeeeee—"shall" the only word which seemed to have a stop to it, curling up at the end like a pair of skis—beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee—monsters in the movies wailed like that at the threat and showing of the Cross—freeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee—ha—ha ha—I shall be free. Not of me, he'd answered automatically; not of me, he'd said, with a depth of seriousness no dipstick was notched sufficiently to measure; not of me, he'd said, shouting, and he fetched her a second and a better one. What are you at the cards for, if you can hear so much? horoscoping, number-nosing, syllable counting, peering at the leaves, or skittering out to consult that bubble-reading Madame Betz, all gyp, by god, no gypsy, just to show off to the competition? and didn't she call you a copy-cunt right in the pleasure of my hearing? and then didn't I have to rough her up? how well you get along, you mystical ladies, pretending to concerns so delicate they can't be seen but only seen through like a pair of seductive panties. Well, none of that's real, you hear me? I'll tell you what's real. I am. I AM REAL. And she had smiled at him from the floor, smiled a smile which spread like syrup, so full of slow sweet pity for him he could have killed her—well—and he did give her a stern toe on account of it and his foot felt as if it were entering a basket of laundry. The idea that his missus had been chaffing for something like the same thing that he, Hess—knicknacked the penholder by his playmates—had, was . . . infuriating, it was . . . humiliating, it was . . . intolerable. Well, no, Father, truth to tell, it's

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hardly been a successful union, a kind of side-by-side life, you might say, as close and on our own, each one of us, as two plants in the same row, stealing substance from one another, water and air and all the rest, what's near, what's by, that's all, yet meeting, I suppose, once in a while, like leaves meet in a pile, for breakfast or in bed—ha—ha ha—never touching except, like I've said, when I reach out and whack her, and not even then, she sees to that, I think she knows days in advance—yes siree, no mistake—why sometimes the bruise will be there, yellow and green like a young banana, before the day before the blow. The rug rolled. Goal or threat. Perhaps a promise. Designs slid out of the rim of his eye. Something to aim at: a telepathic bull's-eye. I don't.

. . . .

: know. The shriek of the bird left silence foaming behind it like a boat's wake and Mr. Hess thought of the boats he had seen in the showroom, turning slowly around and gleaming on their cradles like the girls he had ogled on the stage, paint too perfect for a world of logs and oil, and promising more escape than a plane. So. Well. Who had his hat? Mr. Hess thought he would apologize first for being so faithless—no—he wouldn't put it like that—for being so irregular in attendance, whatever it was, but it didn't matter because he hadn't come about himself, he'd say, but about his wife, Ella, who was in dreadful danger, he felt, he'd say, danger of conspiring, was it? with the Devil. She was a goddamned witch, that's what she was . . . a witch. She said sometimes her real name was Pamphila, Father, and I looked it up at the library, with a little help in the library, and it's the name of a witch—who would believe—? She said it with a small smile—true—a small smile, but in the bathroom one day he'd overheard her singing in her thin thin seldom songful singing voice: *I Conjure and Confirm upon you*, something like, *ye holy Angels*, though she never encountered any, what pretensions, what a liar, *and by the name Cados, Cados, Cados, Eschereie, Eschereie, Hatim, Ya, strong founder of the worlds*, it filled his feet with immobility to hear her, *Cantine, Jaym, Janie, Auie, Calbot, Sabbac, Berisay, Alnaym,* noises she accompanied by clapping, *and by the name Adonay, who created Fishes, and creeping things in the waters, and Birds upon the face of the earth, and by the names of the angels serving in the sixth host,* better she'd been

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masturbating, Father, when I barged in, *before Paster*, she sang, *a holy Angel, and a great Prince*, and she said she was only trying out a conjuration of Thursday that she'd got from Madame Betz, and which amused her . . . amused her! *by all the names aforesaid, I conjure three, Sachiel, a great Angel, who art the chief ruler of Thursday, that for me thou labor*, Father listen to that—my god! Thursday—and he'd lowered his fist like a flag at taps. A witch. A ghoul. Ha, never put a broomstick between those thighs, though, no sir, no siree, she'd ride nothing so phallic as that; she traveled in her mind, rode another wind; and he'd tell the Father how it was, and that although she was spiritual to the point of lily-wilting, she wasn't spiritual in the churchly chichi sort of way, on the contrary, she was the only cunt he ever knew to wear galoshes, the kind that buckle, that swallow your shoe, and he, Hess, who sold insurance and knew about investments in a modest, even humble fashion—money, Father, is my métier—knew she put great stock in all those lives she planned to lead beyond the grave, took great store from them, took . . . tock . . . Who had his hat? He had his hat. The feather and the felt. Then run for fun—he could do that. Who would be missed, the missus or himself? The label and the lining: silk. There was a sign above the hooks which always warned him to watch his coat, and Hess would watch so wrathfully, on celebration Sundays, sometimes, when they went out, he could have swallowed worms and felt well fed, been none the wiser for a wedge of mud. No, no, he'd have proud pie and royal cheese. And take a poster boat to distant cities, see famous landmarks done in strident inks, shape a shy smile of gratitude for the frank solicitations of dark and unintelligible tongues. Then outdoors, what? leafy trees, new green, a breeze. Play catch as catch can there. Watch. She might have been the hook itself he'd hung his hat from, her nose in the band above the brim. Outdoors, what? not the rush and the roar of a wind but the light lift, the almost imperceptible touch, of elevating air. For if Ella looks before, I after, if I left who would replace me? the present has already gone, though in a way it lay around his wrist still, keeping tabs, perhaps more perfectly now it had no need to tick continually and mill its hands or waste its face in darkness. Go. Though catch would come after. Either. It's just that, well, he, Hess, her husband, was worried about her chances since she lately seemed so sick and was this minute stiffer than most corpses, open and empty-eyed, and he had noticed

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recently, that is, in the few moments previous to his present speaking, several brief breaks in her oh-so-shallow breathing, ominous interruptions of the ceiling readings, and little lapses in reception which caused her silence to fall short of itself, toward another silence, like a broken arc, and now her pauses had a puff and stutter to them like that bird of hers when it was angry, and he thought she might be about to Kick the Habit and Cross Over, or whatever one did. Li . . . . . ve. Die. He couldn't settle his heart about it, couldn't get his guts to decide. The Universal Insurance Company of North America presents to Mr. Edgar Hess this Electronically Prepared Personal Proposal of . . . The blue folder contained no certificate, no diploma, no golden seal, no ribbon like a panting tongue, but a promise of protection: the Estate Builder, Econo-matic Life. Reality broke in like a burglar and stole his dreams before he could etch his name. He would raise the hue and cry. He would never be out of work. His desk was littered with electronically prepared proposals. His appointment book was black. His tie was parched, his throat was dry. Hey there, stop—stop wife, stop life. Ha ha. Hess wondered just who had his hat. The rug rose, wetting his knees. Perhaps you might sprinkle her with something, Father, water and oil, to snuff her evil out and sail her off to heaven like a paper airplane. They were blue folders with a red stripe, in soft tabbed paper, privacy assured. The last business was his business, UNICONA's deep concern, he always said, and his clients would nod submission, extend their hands, shake like canisters of ice. Now this moment she might . . . she might go Hence, cut from his face like a whisker, and Hess wondered whether it might have been otherwise, whether their life together had been so totally enformulated that they couldn't help rubbing wrongly together and consequently being in a constant state of mutual exasperation like the sawing legs and so the laughing screams of the cicada—an ill mix from the first, bad match, poor pair, punk job, odd lot, and so forth, a complete and perfect botch; but if she were oil, then he was water, and if she lay quietly in a skirt of colorful irridescence, he fell slowly into darkness and into the depths of himself, beyond all light, beyond the last fish, stonily to stony

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bottom, or perhaps beyond that, bottomlessly un . . . . . der . . . no, he didn't th . . . . . ink so; he thought rather that they might have made it with a little counseling—right—maybe that's all it would have taken—sure—just some authority figure to tell her to V her legs and buck a bit, to come down out of the cumulus and clown around a little, a lot of ladies like to go to the games, scream for the team, lap up a beer, some bowl, and—my gosh—many will respond to a nibble or a twiddle even, consequently square up, Missus Hess, therefore straighten around, don't endeavor to be exceptional, to see camels in clouds or become what we call cipher silly, what do you say? that's zero, the cipher, zerrr-oh, the cold, the O in obliteration. I've known several like you in my time and practice who sought clues to the future in the daily crossword, games of that kind—the X in eccentric is a cancellation, remember—how did they fare? well, they went up, then down, across, or desperately took diagonals like last-minute shoppers at Lazarus's, in the Christmas rush at Macy's or Marshall Field's, but black blocks cut them off eventually, hemmed them in on every hand like smudges on a diner's napkin—Ella, Ella—backed into byways, uneasy always, and there to remain as cats are caught at the hairs' ends of alleys, illumined by doglight—Ella, Ella, Missus, Madame—or compelled to live on a letter like K—what a coffin—so content yourself, ma'am, run for calm like a carrot, resign, accept . . . and Hess felt he could have been content, the conviction had grown on him—indeed was a callus—for what had he asked for? honey in the comb? had it been much? . . . so much? perhaps if he gave her a book of some kind, one which explained marriage and contained diagrams and pictures, anatomy and arrows, though she never had much interest in words laid to rest like that: in so many glassy-eyed rows like results of a gunning. What he wanted was calm, calm was quiet, the stillness of a world which spoke about as often as an onion. Chewing on a hard roll, for instance, the sweet work of the teeth, he thought, sufficiently contained itself. Yes. He felt he could have been content. Ella, however . . . She never joked, never

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saw the funny side of life; when was the last time they'd had a good ho ho together? no, she was always, what? grim? serious at any rate, intense, pitched past every la ti do they'd so far found a line for, prim. Pris . . . . . sy. Cold. Patronizing. She gave him the length of her nose, not a hair—not a fart—from her quim. Ha. Ha ha. Flighty. Notional. Picky. Poky too. Thin. A shoe stirred ever slightly beneath the level of the rug. Was it his? Step on a slat, make your mother fat. Five, six, pull your pricks. Why did he remember that? His memory was mostly reluctance. And then she was always so sickly. Sickness in a skinny woman is particularly . . . . Splaugh. What would happen? malnutrition? cancer? kidney failure, then? Cold. Consider it: ummmmmm. What could he do? Die. Live. I just don't know. Headstrong but bowelweak. Ran in the family. Distant. Cold. Hearthard but tummytender. Normal, then. Cold. While I only wanted . . . . What was it, I once wanted? honey in the comb? Still, I wish, Mr. Hess said. . . . Anyhow, Ella, really, I wish you wou. . . . . .

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Norman Birnbaum and Christopher Lasch

AMERICA TODAY: An Exchange

Birnbaum: I thought we might talk about our perplexities about politics and culture in America now. But perhaps I had best lay out mine, and leave you to speak for yourself. At the root of mine is the fact that our cultural resources—what's called the Western tradition—don't seem to have given us ideas of the kind of lives we might wish to lead, the kinds of values we might wish to pursue, the kinds of people we want to become. This is an eminently political problem because without such ideas there can't be effective movements for change.

In Western Europe, all we seem to have are the welfare state institutions, the socialists, and the presently reformist programs—regardless of their ultimate aims—of the Communists in France and Italy. (In Portugal the situation is, of course, different.) And whether these programs are adequate to the task of creating a just political and economic community is doubtful. In France and Italy where the Communists and socialists are close to entering government together, the parties themselves are currently rather conservative, and neither is eager to be called upon to administer the decline of capitalism.

Lasch: To play the historic role of socialism.

Birnbaum: Right. What ultimately disturbs me is that I can't easily recall a historical precedent for the universal bleakness of the intellectual landscape. There is no conviction that thought which is descriptively correct can have an impact, let alone belief that new ideas can in fact generate a different—or better—situation.

Lasch: Well, what would you say against the view that the decline of the Western tradition, and therefore, the West should not, after all, be looked on as a global catastrophe and that what we are sometimes tempted to regard as cultural exhaustion may signify nothing more than the exhaustion of the West's capacity to exploit the rest of the world.

Birnbaum: I don't know. If one were to study the history of antiquity—if I may advance what is certainly not a new comparison—when power passed

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to the Roman Empire, were not Greek ideas still very important? The political or economic decline of the West need not be accompanied by the decline of our cultural tradition. After all, many of the leaders of the so-called Third World did study at our Western universities, and have taken back to their homeland ideas from the Western tradition. Can one seriously say that Dakar, Beirut, Cairo, Jakarta, Peking are really centers of cultural creativity, much less a new world culture? Another heralded alternative, Latin American culture, has always struck me as a variant, an interesting provincial variant of European civilization—rather like Russia in the nineteenth century.

Perhaps I am wrong and it is merely my ignorance, provincialism, or ethnocentrism which lead me not to see it. You're the historian, though. What do you think about this generation of American intellectuals and their relationship to their culture and to their historical possibilities? Is our experience different from that of the intellectuals of the late twenties and early thirties?

Lasch: The twenties and thirties were different. Not only did the political possibilities seem to be much better, but in this country at least there was an exhilarating sense that the country had culturally come of age, in Van Wyck Brooks's famous phrase. While intellectuals found plenty to criticize in American culture and in American life as a whole, even those who expatriated themselves or, later, turned to revolutionary political solutions had the sense of contributing directly to cultural and political renewal.

Perhaps the present mood in the United States is more like the pessimism of certain European intellectuals in the years between the Franco-Prussian War and World War I. I wouldn't want to argue that this pessimism was very general, but the sense of cultural disintegration, for which Nietzsche is still seen as the most important spokesman, seems to have more in common with the current mood than anything one can find in the cultural history of the United States.

Birnbaum: Wasn't Nietzsche more than a negative critic? Didn't he propose a new model: man reconciled with himself? That's precisely the kind of model that is not now available with any conviction or with any program.

Lasch: Yes, that's the difference between Nietzsche's time and ours. What survives today, not only of Nietzsche's work but of the whole tradition of social thought he stood in, is only the negative and critical side, without any of the hopes that in part provoked this criticism of modern society. And even to uphold the negative side is becoming increasingly difficult without inviting charges of elitism and political irresponsibility.

Birnbaum: It's true that much of the populism of the American New Left, in particular, was of a breathtaking degree of simplemindedness and

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vulgarity. It itself represented the latest incarnation of the American philistinism which it thought it was opposing. Lionel Trilling recently published an article in the *American Scholar*. In it he announces, with genuine regret, that it is no longer possible in this society to promulgate notions of high culture with any conviction, at least in part because of a new property of modern American culture: a limitless search for a boundaryless self. He connects this development somehow with mass higher education and the mass diffusion of high culture, precisely those things which one would have thought an earlier generation of liberals would have welcomed.

It seems to me that you were onto something when you talked about the fear of being negative, but I would think there are two kinds of negativity. There is a global negativity which argues that everything now is terrible and therefore we can only defend old positions in an antiquarian way. And there's a negativity which argues that all the available solutions, even the old ones, are no good and new ones must be invented.

Lasch: I agree that there is a great difference between these two positions. The second refuses among other things to set up against the present disorder an idealized and nostalgically remembered past. Unfortunately, part of the trouble is that the difference is not always easy to perceive when there are no movements interested in inventing new solutions. In the absence of any real political alternatives—the absence of a left—it becomes difficult for many people to distinguish between the positions: both of them are opposed to slogans of cultural liberation when what the slogans really call for is impulse gratification, a kind of demand feeding of the self.

Birnbaum: Consider, however, this paradox. The Europeans have the kind of political movements you say America lacks. European socialism feels itself revitalized. Yet even there, the impression of cultural exhaustion is unchanged by a political context much more favorable than our own.

Lasch: You see political developments in Europe as much more hopeful than I do.

Birnbaum: At the least, one can say that the political space for certain kinds of cultural experiment or development, a protected cultural space, may be somewhat larger there.

Lasch: I'm not sure. That may be only a function of the backwardness of the culture industry in Europe as compared with the United States, where there are fewer forces to resist its almost total domination of public discussion. I don't mean that the media in America are necessarily hostile to cultural experiment. On the contrary, their receptivity to changes in cultural fashion instantly turns all cultural developments into marketable commodities, thereby nullifying their capacity to provoke thought, let alone action. Ideas and programs formerly promulgated by the avant garde—the

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idea of alienation for example—have become objects of popular consumption, thanks to the efficiency with which not only the press and television, but also the universities, the advertising industry, and guardians of public morality reproduce almost all forms of culture for a mass market.

What I'm interested in is your notion that there may not, after all, be an organic connection between culture and politics. Does this mean you subscribe to Bell's theory of the disjunction between politics and culture?

Birnbaum: Bell's theory of the disjunction of politics and culture is clearly, I think, a theory of their conjunction. Bell has argued that our administrative and productive system has reached a point at which the cultural values of the elite—the bourgeois—are irrelevant to the functioning of the system. In effect, he has supplied us with a renewed or refurbished version of the theory of the exhaustion of bourgeois culture. At the end, he simply asks, "so what?" and demonstrates that the system which has reduced to impotence the purveyors of these cultural values can and must continue. It continues, of course, because those in command of the system have post-bourgeois values which are not modernist but technocratic. They may indeed be anti-values.

Lasch: Something he would deny, of course.

Birnbaum: I suppose that we should honor his denial, but the thrust of his thought points the other way.

Lasch: I must say I find compelling but hardly reassuring the argument that bourgeois culture or high culture in the contemporary economy is functionally irrelevant. It's quite compatible with a psychological analysis of modern society that stresses the obsolescence or dysfunction of conscience and the psychological processes that formerly shaped it.

We do seem to have a society that no longer requires, as psychological cement, authority and, in particular, paternal authority—at least, not in the same way an earlier form of bourgeois society required it. Nor does our society seem to require the kind of family structures that characterized not only bourgeois society in earlier stages but many of its predecessors.

Birnbaum: Your remark reminds me of one of Mitscherlich's: his was that a historical change requires three generations to work itself out. The grandparents experience the change but transmit (however unintendedly or unconsciously) older models of existence to the next generation, which in turn struggles with new experience which it has to confront with old models, historically inappropriate or maladapted psychic structure. Then a generation is born which can take all of this more or less for granted, can mobilize its psychic resources to meet the real problems of a changed historical situation. That's a very crude summary, but it is roughly what the analysis entails. When we apply it to our present situation however, we have

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to say that the new or third generation has few psychic resources with which to confront our history. We have few cultural resources either. In the process something of ineluctable value has been lost which cannot be replaced.

Lasch: It could be argued, of course, that if it takes three generations for any far-reaching characterological changes to work themselves out, this particular process is only beginning, and that it is therefore too soon to come to any conclusions about it. This argument seems to me somewhat evasive. If it is true that conscience is being superceded by other forms of personality organization and social cohesion, I would agree that what is being lost, for all its own pathological side effects, is irreplaceable. This reorganization, or perhaps simply disintegration, of personality is the psychic foundation of the growing demand for immediate impulse gratification and also of the tendency to equate fulfillment of these demands with political and cultural emancipation.

Birnbaum: You're putting yourself (and myself) clearly in the camp of the cultural traditionalists. I don't mind being there—after all, for Marx, a major justification of socialism was that it was the only way to realize bourgeois cultural values. But if in fact we face a world in which new historical structures and new modes of gratification combine to propagate values we despise—and we can no longer imagine any social institutions that can generate cultural values we espouse—that is a very serious matter.

Lasch: It is a matter, however, insofar as it concerns the family, about which your colleagues in sociology provide very little guidance. Academic sociologists, until the seventies at least, have resisted the very proposition that the family is in some kind of trouble. The position they defend is that the family has gained in emotional services what it has lost in the way of economic, educational, and protective functions.

Birnbaum: What do you think that "emotional services" means to them? That the family does more for people, or that more is attempted?

Lasch: It does more for people, because it's lost its economic and protective functions and therefore can concentrate on serving as a kind of asylum for feelings that have to be suppressed elsewhere. The world of work is cold and impersonal, and the family provides consolation for deprivations suffered at work, goes the typical argument. Parsons, whose theory of the family still commands a good deal of respect, constantly compares what goes on in the family to psychotherapy.

Birnbaum: A therapeutic community in miniature?

Lasch: A therapeutic community; a haven in a heartless world.

Birnbaum: Others would argue that precisely this overloading of the family emotively is what is destroying it. The seventies rewrite of the suburban

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scenario of the fifties has the husband coming home to a wife who terms him an oppressor for monopolizing the exciting world of work. Yet the exciting world of work is one in which most men are dominated, frustrated, exploited.

Lasch: Parsons himself seems to admit that it causes more forms of sickness than it can cure. I suppose the usual way of dealing with this kind of information, from sociologists of the family to social workers, is to argue that familial therapy, and therapy in general, simply has to become more effective. The burden of the new psychiatric movements one might characterize collectively under the heading of psychiatric self-help seems to be that people have to "get in touch with their feelings" and to become more adept at performing therapeutic roles for each other. But what it often seems to come down to, at least for marriage and the family, is that the participants have to become more adept at absorbing various forms of abuse.

Birnbaum: Doesn't that impose moral demands upon the human personality which are excessive? Freud's critique of culture was that it imposed excessive demands on a humanity little able to bear them, and that for most persons the cost of what he termed "instinctual renunciation" was too high.

Lasch: He was right.

Birnbaum: This belief was connected not only with his critique of culture; it was part of something else in his philosophy, a critique of average humanity. Only a cultural elite found, in his view, the rewards of culture roughly in balance with the cost exacted from them. Where the very idea of an elite is suspect, who will honor those who pay the price? Perhaps the doctrine of limitless gratification is, as the traditionalists suspect, a not entirely subtle form of cultural class warfare—or psychological guerilla action.

The chief injustice Freud himself thought about was injustice in the distribution of gratification, with the family imposing one kind of restraint and the idea of work another. If Freud was right, I do not see how you can erect a defense of traditional values that are being eroded by new developments. In fact, these values are based on illusions created by specific historical conditions—in sum, on a notion of humanity which is neither socially nor biologically tenable in the long run.

Lasch: I should have added that although I think Freud was right in saying that most people pay too high a price, it's becoming more and more clear that the alternatives are no better.

Birnbaum: I was going to say, not paying the price may be worse.

Lasch: In "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life," Freud's analysis of what he calls psychic impotence amounts to a damning

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indictment of civilized sexual morality, as he calls it elsewhere. But he immediately goes on to say that "unrestrained" sexual liberty is no better than the prolonged abstinence and deprivation formerly imposed by civilized sexual morality. It isn't just that some obstacle is necessary "to swell the tide of libido to its height." What Freud perhaps does *not* anticipate is the way in which glamor and sexiness have become themselves part of the apparatus of domination—the phenomenon aptly characterized by Marcuse as repressive desublimation.

Birnbaum: I am trying to think of some way to counter this pessimism. Let's suppose a kind of neo-Marxist utopia in which the Western and industrialized nations would have agreed to give some considerable share of their gross national product to underdeveloped societies. Then imagine that the world disequilibrium in resource and wealth accumulation was righted. A global sense of justice, or an anticipation of one, would then be at least possible. The material problems of existence having been solved, the inhabitants of the advanced societies could then turn in the classic Marxist sense to the cultivation of the new human personality and new cultural values. Of course, I've left out something critical to the Marxist argument, the reversal or revolution in property relationships and the devising of new communal institutions for economic production and distribution.

Let's say we're in the middle of the process. Would socialist revolution in the West give you more occasion to hope, or less? The cultural meaning of socialism, after all, is that it would create the possibility of a new human personality. Socialism does not claim to be the expression of a new human identity, to use that contemporary phrase. Socialism would create the conditions under which a new human identity could develop, or be developed, more or less self-consciously. If that is *not* true, then I can understand a great deal of cultural pessimism, including our own.

Lasch: Maybe the objectives of socialism have to be stated more modestly. You said Marx thought socialism was the only way to realize bourgeois values. In our own time it may become the only way of realizing any values at all. It may have become the only chance for human survival. I think I could live with your utopia, even if the development of a new identity remained problematic; and I do have questions about whether a change in the form of production invariably means a change in the human psyche.

I'm pessimistic now for two reasons. First, it is unfortunately impossible to say, except for the purposes of examining the implications of your neo-Marxist utopia, that we are in the midst of a revolution in property relationships. If anything, social and economic inequalities, both within the advanced countries and as between advanced countries and poor ones, are growing worse all the time. Second, we seem to be undergoing a process of

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cultural leveling in which the masses attempt to impose their own culture (actually the culture of the culture industry) on the elites—a very different process from the ideal envisioned by nineteenth-century democrats and even by apostles of high culture such as Matthew Arnold. They imagined a situation in which "the best that has been known and thought" would become available to anyone who cared to listen. Instead we have a situation in which the worst tends to dilute the best, and in which critical thinking becomes synonomous in the popular mind with privilege.

So we have the worst of everything, an ever-widening gap between rich and poor combined with a regressive egalitarianism in culture. Ultimately, the decay of critical thought makes it all the more difficult to mount a sustained attack on social and economic equality.

Birnbaum: If we're to talk about socio-economic problems, or political-economic problems, three occur to me. First, of course, there is the internal crisis of capitalism. Second, we have to deal with the continuing confrontation between the developed and underdeveloped countries. Third, a fragmented capitalist is now opposed to an internally divided Communist world. These questions are obviously connected, but they have to be treated separately. What can we say about the first one? The United States, at least, faces its crisis without what the French call a *solution de rechange*, without a socialist alternative. Even the critique of capitalism is rather muted. How do we explain that, particularly after the sixties?

Lasch: One of the reasons is that the collapse and the lunacy of the New Left—the lunacy that always existed side by side with whatever was admirable in it—have done a good deal to discredit the possibility of any leftist solution. I'm struck by the lack of political interest on the part of students now coming into college. I can't document it, but I'm convinced that the New Left had something to do with turning students away not just from radicalism but from politics, partly because its own inflated expectations of what it could accomplish gave rise to inflated estimates of its failure and of the futility of any kind of political action.

As we get further away from the sixties, the New Left will probably be seen more as a cultural movement than as a political movement. Political radicalism has collapsed, but cultural radicalism has survived and is becoming more and more respectable. Historians looking back on this period will have to distinguish between long-range social and cultural tendencies and the immediate effects of the Vietnamese war. Speaking of which, what do you think will be its effect? Would you argue that there has been any real diminution of American world power, not only vis-à-vis the non-Western world, but vis-à-vis other capitalist nations?

Birnbaum: There has been a change, though perhaps one which preceded

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Vietnam. Alain Touraine has recently spoken of a new hand in cards dealt out within the capitalist bloc. The fact that the West German standard of living is higher than our own is an indication of what is happening. The neo-capitalist societies, more modern than our own in many ways, have become stronger: they can sell better goods more cheaply on the world market. And though dollar devaluation and domestic inflation may assist our capitalists, it won't assist the working class, whose relative position is in decline. And by working class I also mean those who live as we professionals do, by selling labor.

Which raises again the question of the potential of American socialism. The legacy of the New Left surely is not exclusively cultural—it is mainly that, of course, but not entirely that. After all, there were millions of people in it who developed the idea, however crudely or incoherently, that our society is dominated by corporate capitalism, which, as it were, industrially fabricated many of the values they abhorred. Surely, this has not been forgotten entirely. Can these people be remobilized for a more enduring form of political action?

Lasch: Well, at one time I thought that since many of them were returning to graduate school with the intention of becoming serious scholars, at least the New Left would have some intellectual impact. And I've been enormously impressed by the dedication of the young socialist scholars that came out of the sixties, and with the work they've produced, although not much of that work has so far been published. Unfortunately, the academic depression makes it more difficult than ever for such people to get a foothold in academic life. The depression is filtering out the best people and producing yet another generation of dull, respectable, young, conformist scholars. I still don't entirely exclude the possibility that people who received their political training in the New Left will eventually make some impact on the academic disciplines and the way in which issues are formulated. But there remains the question of whether such a development would in turn have any effect on national politics.

Birnbaum: What you are saying is that the New Left was a social movement that criticized affluence; it was not developed in a period of unemployment and economic crisis. After all, what we might have expected is a rapprochement of new and older modes of left thought during periods of recession or depression. But can one really conceive of a new working class movement headed by leaders like Woodcock or Wurf, and the recent insurgents in steel abandoning a Meanyite politics? The radicalization of the working class—particularly of the young workers—the depression should have brought has not happened. For all the talk about new alignments in the Democratic Party, its response to the crisis of capitalism is

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a welfare capitalist response: increased federal spending, public job programs, and so on. Not a single Democrat in Congress has introduced a bill proposing nationalizing the oil industry.

Lasch: Still it could be argued that what you call the crisis of capitalism is only now becoming really acute and that its full effects are only now beginning to be widely felt. If welfare liberalism really rests on an assumption of continuing economic growth—an assumption which until recently most people found it unnecessary to question, even during the Great Depression—its days may be numbered. When the fact of continued expansion begins to be widely questioned, and when it becomes apparent that implementing traditional liberal programs will require an actual redistribution of wealth—cutting up the same pie instead of baking a bigger one—then welfare liberalism may cease to have any appeal to the working class, and more radical programs will begin to win adherents.

Birnbaum: But such responses are never produced mechanically by historical situations: they come, rather, in situations which have been anticipated, ideologically. The question Robert Bellah raised recently as to whether the American ethos allows anything like the development of socialist political ideas, becomes more and more interesting.

Lasch: Whatever else we can say about the prospects for American socialism, we can say that of the various capitalist countries, the United States is about the last place one would look for the development of a powerful and radical socialist movement. It's more likely that some serious attempt at a general transfer of power would take place in Western Europe, in some major industrialized country.

Birnbaum: I agree, and I think that we spend so much energy accusing the Western European socialists of being overly integrated with their capitalist societies that we overlook the extent to which certain transfers of power which would be regarded as revolutionary in this country have taken place there. The furthest we go here is that a senior partner in Lazard Freres, Felix Rohatyn, has called for economic planning in the U.S., and a bill calling for planning was proposed by Senators Humphrey and Javits—who have joined Rohatyn and some unionists in a committee to advocate planning in European neo-capitalist form. However, the most efficient way to run capitalism may be under the name socialism, with socialist parties to discipline the working class.

Lasch: But if the ultimate fate of socialist parties is to keep alive a moribund capitalism, it is no longer clear what are the advantages of being politically more advanced.

Birnbaum: In terms of the struggle between the developed and under-

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developed nations, it is difficult for any of us to see the Shah of Iran or the new King of Saudi Arabia as leaders of an embattled world proletariat—even though a crude Marxist interpretation of what has happened, say in the raising of oil prices, could be that proletarian nations or nation classes have resisted giving up raw materials at prices which impoverish them in world-market terms. What does this kind of action mean for the future of the industrial societies in general?

Lasch: We can envisage a world in which the major powers will find themselves increasingly unable to impose their will on the rest of the world. Presumably this will exacerbate the economic difficulties the capitalist countries, at any rate, are already beginning to experience at home.

Birnbaum: It also appears that within the so-called Third World, there is a Fourth World. The Third World consists of countries with raw materials to sell. But the Fourth World countries have neither adequate supplies of raw materials to sell on the world market nor enough resources for themselves. We have to transform our simple models of global exploitation into more complex ones, in which not only the industrialized countries including the Soviet Union but underdeveloped ones with resources combine somehow, together exploiting nations poorer still. And no political solution, no mediating mechanisms are in sight. The facts of international relations in this period are that the identities of the strong may change, but those who are strongest are going to impose their global will upon the others.

Lasch: Vietnam, the dissolution of the cold war power blocs, and the oil embargo itself all seem to me to call that proposition into question. At the very least these developments suggest, as you say, a change in the identity of the strongest; and we might ask whether this change makes any difference.

Birnbaum: Possibly, some, and that leads us to the Communist bloc. I'm struck by how little magnetic power is exercised by China or the Soviet Union. For the advanced industrial societies, the Soviet Union is neither an inspiration nor a model—politically or economically, and certainly not in its philistine culture. The Chinese enjoy a certain amount of credit in the Third and Fourth Worlds for their modes of aid as well as for their own internal achievements, but there is little prospect of the Chinese assuming the leadership of the Third and Fourth Worlds, or any parts of them. Perhaps the secret of Chinese Communism is not that it is a new version of Leninism for backward countries, but a new version of Marxism, successfully fused with a very old and complex culture, which has been able to achieve national goals like independence, psychic and cultural self-sufficiency. And what this suggests is that there is no one global, much less

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revolutionary, model of development for the Third and Fourth Worlds.[1]

Lasch: Any more than there is a polarized structure of international power, dominated by the superpowers. At one time the dissolution of the wartime alliances and of monolithic Communist and capitalist blocs would have seemed an eminently desirable development. But now it is no longer clear that a politically fragmented world will be any more pleasant or safe to live in than one dominated by two or three great powers.

Birnbaum: If the picture of struggle is in fact a Hobbesian one, international society has been reduced to the state of nature from which we thought it had begun to emerge. The creation of a world market has not been accompanied by the creation of a world culture or a world polity.

Lasch: I'm wondering about the theoretical implications of that statement. We might view American history as a precedent for this curious situation. It wouldn't be a bad sketch of American history to say that the creation of a national market wasn't followed by the creation of a national or public culture or even, perhaps, of a very securely grounded political order.

Birnbaum: That's not an interpretation of American history I am prepared to dispute, but if it is accurate, imagine then what the chances are for a political or public culture in a world dominated by multinational corporations. Nor, as the left assumes, would the overthrow of the multinationals produce a better world polity, or restore the polity or culture that existed before. There is also a pseudo-evolutionary theory which argues that the spread of a certain kind of technology and economic psychology will modernize everything, that is, make every place more like the United States. Am I right in saying that we hear less of "modernization" in our universities these days—it seems to me one last use of it was made by Samuel Huntington, who argued that "modernizing" rural Vietnam would deprive the national liberation movement of its popular basis. Perhaps that was a clue to some of the ideological sources of a certain kind of vacuity in academic social science.

Lasch: Unfortunately this vacuity has been enthusiastically inherited by the

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[1] The editors have asked us to comment, separately, on the Cambodian Revolution. Even this brutal, distant, and strange revolution has been accompanied by a comedy, a grotesque distortion of some of our own. In the last hours of the seige of Pnom-Pehn, a group of young bourgeois "revolutionaries" (their leader, a "general" in his twenties, was a playboy in the capital, son of one of Lon Nol's generals) put on red scarves, commandeered some armoured cars and took the surrender of the last 30,000 "Republican" troops.

The comedy ended, of course, when the peasant army of the Khmer Rouge entered the city—and promptly evacuated it. Now I read of a decree that only Cambodian is henceforth to be spoken in the nation. Revolutionary purity and national cultural integrity, alike, are to be attained by an agrarian society, encapsulated from the world. The Maoists hold that the countryside will encircle and conquer the city, but they have not thought of emptying Peking or Shanghai or of renouncing industrialization. In a world of centrally fabricated

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so-called new social history, which has taken over the concept of modernization from the social sciences and given it a new lease on life—or perhaps we should say, provided it with a final resting place. Even Marxist historians have taken over much of modernization theory—not surprisingly, since the theory itself, if it can be dignified by that name, originates in economic and technological determinism, often confused with Marxism. Whether in their Marxist or liberal version, all such theories are now proving their complete inadequacy in the face of a world that is clearly being neither Americanized, modernized, communized, nor otherwise inexorably transformed in accordance with some overriding principle of historical development.

Birnbaum: We're back where we started—facing an uncertain situation. We cannot say what will actually happen. Of all that can be said about the Chinese, maybe one of the wisest things they've done is that they've stayed out of things they could not control.

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cultures and ideologies, we may expect more primitivism of the Cambodian sort. Rousseau, it would appear, has triumphed over Marx.

We share responsibility for the Cambodian Revolution, in two senses. It was American power that ravaged the countryside. And the leaders of the revolution share some culture with ourselves: the theorists of agrarian purity have doctorates from the Sorbonne. NORMAN BIRNBAUM, June 30, 1975.

Shortly after the evacuation of Pnom-Pehn I wrote that the so-called peasant revolution in Cambodia would lead to another socialist dictatorship—a socialism of barbed wire, the forced march, the forced confession, the concentration camp, and "self-criticism." Friends have told me that this view is too gloomy. Emptying the cities as the prelude to periodic purifications of the social order, it appears, is an old tradition in Cambodia. A Cambodia friendly to China, moreover, might help to offset the close relation between North Vietnam and the Soviet Union. The first of these objections probably rests on the same kind of wishful thinking that welcomed the Chinese Communists in 1949 as "agrarian reformers." The second appears to assume that Southeast Asia and the rest of the world are destined to be dominated by great powers—a proposition that is by no means self-evident, as we have argued above. CHRISTOPHER LASCH, July 9, 1975.

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Juliet Mitchell

WOMEN AND EQUALITY

Let us put first things first. There may be some in my country and yours who will want to argue that one group of people are not the equals of another group. They will contend that differences are not individual but general to a group and are a mark of inferiority or superiority. There are certainly, I think, limitations to the concept of equality. These are both problematic questions that I shall take up in the course of this talk, but I want to start by establishing a fact: democratic countries have as one of their highest aspirations, the attaining of equality by their citizens, but in no democratic country in the world do women have equal rights with men. Feminists, members of the by now practically worldwide women's liberation movement, face a fair amount of abuse of one sort or another, but one of the most frequent sallies they receive is the confident assertion that they have nothing left to fight for but the crumbs. This is not the case. No one is arguing that there are not other deprived groups in any given society; but feminists are stating and demonstrating that women *as women* are deprived and oppressed.

England has been a so-called democratic country for over three hundred years, equality has been a guiding principle, yet this is how the authors of a very recent survey of women's rights in Britain introduce their researches:

> At no level of society do (women) have equal rights with men. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, women had virtually no

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> rights at all. They were the chattels of their fathers and husbands. They were bought and sold in marriage. They could not vote. They could not sign contracts. When married, they could not own property. They had no rights over their children and no control over their own bodies. Their husbands could rape and beat them without fear of legal reprisals. When they were not confined to the home, they were forced by growing industrialization to join the lowest levels of the labour force. *Since then, progress towards equal rights for women has been very slow indeed.* (My italics)

The authors go on to document how in work, education, social facilities and under the law women are treated as men's inferiors and, despite appearances such as equal pay acts, equality is never attained: "We have an Equal Pay Act but we don't have equal pay."

Equal Rights are an important tip of an iceberg that goes far deeper. That they are only a tip is both a reflection of the limitation of the concept of equality and an indication of how profound and fundamental is the problem of the oppression of women. The position of women in any given society can be taken as a mark of the progress of civilization or *humanization* within that society. There may be slave societies, such as that of the Ptolemies, in which there is an elite of privileged women, but it is not such an elite that we are talking about when we consider the position of women in general as the index of human advance: men and women actually become human in relation to each other and if one sex is denigrated then humanity itself is the loser. I don't mean this in the simple sense that any exploitation or oppression diminishes the dignity of the whole society—though that is, of course, the case—but in the rather special sense that it is precisely in his transformation of the functions of sexuality and reproduction into human communication (language and emotional relationship) that at a basic level man as an animal becomes man as human being.

That is the depth of the nature of the problem of the oppression of women. The position of women as a social group in relation to men as another social group goes far deeper, then, than the question of equal rights, but equal rights are an important part of it and, furthermore, the struggle for these rights has an intimate connection with the whole history of feminism as a conscious social and political movement.

But first, what are the strengths and limitations of the concept of equality? I want to give a parallel account: first, the meaning of the

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concept of equality followed by an attempt to relate it to the history of feminism, and then some suggestions on how we must, while never undervaluing it, go beyond equality. In attempting to establish such a general history, I am going to use the example I know best—that of England. Fortunately England does provide something of a model—an exemplary case—of the historical connections I want to make. But, with obviously important variations, all capitalist and later industrial capitalist countries have crucial similarities and it should be possible to slot another particular example into the general framework provided by English history.

The economic development of capitalism is always uneven and the ideological world view that goes with that economic development will likewise be uneven and not necessarily in a parallel manner. This consideration has two unrelated consequences for what I want to say here. Firstly it means that you may find that what I say about the concept of equality or arguments about the position of women in England in the seventeenth century, in the country you know best (*a*) fit better a different epoch and (*b*) are not precisely matched to the same economic events. As I don't intend to consider, except cursorily, the material economic and social base either of the development of capitalism or of the position of women, but only some particular ideologies and politics that go with it, this sort of comparison is one you will have to make independently. The society you are familiar with may be "before" or "behind." It will certainly be different, though I trust you will recognize the similarities. The second consequence of the uneven development of any ideological world view has an effect that is intrinsic to this talk: as I am tracing a continuity in ideas, the discontinuities will get short shrift. The material position of women has zigzagged like a fairground cakewalk or the proverbial snail up the side of a wall—two slithers up and one slither down, sometimes one up and two down as the authors I quoted earlier record:

> Progress towards equal rights for women has been very slow indeed. There have even been times when the tide seemed to turn against them. The first law against abortion was passed in 1803. It imposed a sentence of life imprisonment for termination within the first fourteen weeks of pregnancy. In 1832 the first law was passed which forbade women to vote in elections. In 1877 the first Trades Union Congress upheld the tradition that women's place

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> was in the home whilst man's duty was to protect and provide for her.

Certainly both the history of feminism and the ideology of equality in general and for women in particular offer a monument to the law of uneven development. It is a monument I shall largely pass by in selecting the continuous track.

Equality as a principle—never as a practice—has been an essential part of the political ideology of all democratic capitalist societies since their inception. In being this it has expressed both the highest aspiration and the grossest limitation of that type of society. The mind of liberal and social democratic man soars into the skies with his belief in equality only to find that it must return, like the falcon, chained to the wrist whence it came. For it is not only that capitalist society (which produces its own version of both liberal and social democratic thought) cannot produce the goods or practice what it preaches but that the premise on which it bases its faith in equality is a very specific and a very narrow one. The capitalist system under which, in different ways, we live establishes as the premise of its ideological concept of equality the economic fact of an exchange of commodities: a commodity is exchanged for another of roughly equal value. In overthrowing the noble landlords of a preceding period the newly arising and revolutionary bourgeoisie made free and equal access to the production and exchange of commodities the basis of man's estate: individual achievement replaced aristocratic birth.

In England in the late fifteenth century, the absolutist monarchy first overcame the multiplicity of feudal lords and the multifariousness of competing jurisdictions of secular and temporal powers. As happened later in France, for example, the central power of the still largely feudal monarch created and integrated large economic areas and established an equality of duties. The notion of equality of duties stands midway between a system of privilege asserted by feudal landlords and the concept of equality of rights propounded by the capitalist middle classes in the seventeenth century in England and the late eighteenth century in France. The legal edifice which enshrined the new equality of rights replaced the harmony between a law of privilege and economic privilege with a complete disjuncture between legal equality and economic disparity—if disparity is not too mild a word to fit the bill.

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In bourgeois ideology everyone has access to the dominant entrepreneurial class. In the capitalist economy that it expresses, of course, the majority of the people do not. For the accumulation of capital—which is the rationale of capitalism—profits must be made; for profits to be made there is one particular commodity that cannot be equally exchanged and it is the only commodity that the majority of the population possess—the commodity of labor power. In a capitalist system the person who only has one commodity to sell (his labor power) is thought to be doing this in a free and equal way—no one enforces his labor and he is paid a "fair" wage for the job. But in fact, if profits are to be made and capital to accumulate, there is no way in which a wage could be *equal* to the proferred labor power—the labor power must produce *more* than the wage answers for, else where is the profit to come from? (The worker's labor power, which is in a sense himself, produces a surplus.) The freedom to work is little more than the freedom not to go hungry: the equal bargaining power of employer and employee is the right of the employer to hire or dismiss the employee and the right of the employee to be dismissed or go on strike—without a wage.

Under capitalism "equality" can only refer to equality under the law. Because it cannot take into account the fundamental inequities of the class society on which it is based, the law itself must treat men as a generalizable and abstract category. It must ignore not only their individual differences, their different needs and abilities, but the absolute differences in their social and economic positions. Since the seventeenth century the law has expressed this, its precondition.

Bourgeois, capitalist law is a general law that ensures that everybody is equal before it: it is abstract and applies to all cases and all persons. As the political theorist Franz Neumann writes: "A minimum of equality is guaranteed, for if the law-maker must deal with persons and situations in the abstract he thereby treats persons and situations as equals and is precluded from discriminating against any specific person." In writing further of the concept of political freedom with which the bourgeois concept of equality is very closely linked, Neumann continues to analyze this particular capitalist notion of law in these terms:

> The generality of the law is thus the precondition of judicial independence, which, in turn, makes possible the realization of

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> the minimum liberty and equality that inheres in the formal structure of the law.
>
> The formal structure of the law is, moreover, equally decisive in the operation of the social system of a competitive-contractual society. The need for calculability and reliability of the legal and administrative system was one of the reasons for the limitation of the power of the patrimonial monarchy and of feudalism. This limitation culminated in the establishment of the legislative power of parliaments by means of which the middle classes controlled the administrative and fiscal apparatus and exercised a condominium with the crown in changes of the legal system. A competitive society requires general laws as the highest form of purposive rationality, for such a society is composed of a large number of entrepreneurs of about equal power. Freedom of the commodity market, freedom of the labour market, free entrance into the entrepreneurial class, freedom of contract, and rationality of the judicial responses in disputed issues—these are the essential characteristics of an economic system which requires and desires the production for profit, and ever renewed profit in a continuous, rational capitalistic enterprise.

The law, then, enshrines the principles of freedom and equality—so long as you do not look at the particular unequal conditions of the people who are subjected to it. The concept "equal under the law" does not apply to the economic inequities it is there to mask. The law is general, therefore, *as men* employer and employee are equal. The law does not consider the inequality of their position. Equality always denies the inequality inherent in its own birth as a concept. The notions of equality, freedom, or liberty do not drop from the skies; their meaning will be defined by the particular historical circumstances that give rise to them in any given epoch. Rising as the slogan of a bourgeois revolution, equality most emphatically denies the new class inequalities that such a revolution sets up—the equality exists only as an abstract standard of measurement between people reduced to their abstract humanity under the law.

Those seem to me to be some of the limitations of the concept of equality—what of its strengths? When a rising bourgeoisie is struggling against an old feudal order, that is, before it has firmly constituted itself as the dominant class, in its aspirations it does in some sense represent all the social classes that were subordinate previously: its revolution initially is a revolution on behalf of all the oppressed

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against the then dominant class—the nobility. The ideological concepts that the bourgeoisie will forge in this struggle are universalistic ones—they are about *most* people and the society most people want. New formulations about "human nature" will jostle with old ones and eventually set themselves as permanent truths. New values, such as a belief in the supremacy of reason, will be treated as though they have always been the pinnacle to which men try to ascend. These ideas will seem to be not only timeless but classless. Equality is one of them. Equality is the aspiration of the bourgeoisie at the moment when as the revolutionary class it represents all classes.

The liberal universalistic concept of equality, encapsulating the highest and best aspirations of the society, is represented by these words of Jeremy Taylor's: "if a man be exalted by reason of any excellence in his soul, he may please to remember that all souls are equal, and their differing operations are because their instrument is in better tune, their body is more healthful or better-tempered; which is no more praise to him than it is that he were born in Italy." Taylor recognizes that there are differences but these should not count. It is this universalistic aspect of the concept that has continued in the most ennobled liberal and social-democratic thought within capitalism; because it is instituted as a demand of the revolutionary moment it soars above the conditions that create it, but because this revolution is based on these conditions—the conditions of creating two new antagonistic "unequal" classes—to these conditions it must eventually return trapped by the hand that controls even its flight.

A history of the concept of equality would run in tracks very similar to a history of feminism. First introduced as one of the pinnacles of the new society's ideology in revolutionary England of the seventeenth century, the notion of equality next reached a further high in the era of enlightenment in the eighteenth century and then with the French Revolution. Feminism likewise has both the continuity and the fits and starts of this trajectory. Feminism as a conscious, that is self-conscious, protest movement, arose as part of a revolutionary bourgeois tradition that had equality of mankind as its highest goal. The first expressions of feminism were endowed with the strengths of the concept of equality and circumscribed by its limitations. Feminism arose in England in the seventeenth century as a conglomeration of precepts and a series of demands by women who saw themselves as a

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distinct sociological group and one that was completely excluded from the tenets and principles of the new society. The seventeenth-century feminists were middle-class women who argued their case in explicit relation to the massive change in society that came about with the end of feudalism and the beginning of capitalism. As the new bourgeois man held the torch up against absolutist tyranny and argued for freedom and equality, the new bourgeois woman wondered why she was being left out.

Writing on marriage in the year seventeen hundred, Mary Astell asked:

> If Absolute Sovereignty be not necessary in a State how comes it to be so in a Family? or if in a Family why not in a State; since no reason can be alleg'd for the one that will not hold more strongly for the other,

and:

> if *all Men are born free,* how is it that all Women are born slaves? As they must be if the being subjected to the *inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary Will* of Men, be the perfect Condition of Slavery?

How could men proclaim social change and a new equality in the eyes of the Lord and consistently ignore one half of the population? It is to the values of the revolutionary society and against those of the old that the feminists appealed. The old society was represented by arbitrary rule, superstition, irrational custom, and pointless pedantry of argument. More problematic were the continued use of two otherwise rightly respected sources—Aristotle and the Bible.

Aristotle's contribution to the debate on the status of women can be summarized by his comment: "... and woman is, as it were, an impotent male, for it is through a certain incapacity that the female is female." The arguments the women made against this were organized around a thorough refutation of any *natural* inferiority: there was no physical, "bodily" difference in men's and women's minds (it was left to the nineteenth century to try and prove there was a physiological, racial and sexual defect here). The power of reason was the mark of mankind's superiority over the beasts. If women were deficient in this

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it could only be as a result of their lack of educational and social opportunities for improving their minds.

Considerable ingenuity was spent reinterpreting the assumed mysogyny of the Bible. Mary Astell demonstrated that St. Paul in crucial passages was arguing not literally but allegorically, yet beneath the sophistication of her own argument there is a simple appeal to the new commonsensical aspect of reason: "For the Earthly *Adam's* being *Form'd* before *Eve*, seems as little to prove her Natural Subjection to him, as the Living Creatures, Fishes, Birds and Beasts being Form'd before them both, proves that Mankind must be subject to these Animals."

The feminists ask for the equal status that they insist any reasonable person must grant they should have by right of all the professed values of the society. As the anonymous author of "An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex" writes in her dedication to Princess Ann of Denmark: "I have only endeavour'd to reduce the Sexes to a Level, and by Arguments to raise Ours to an Equality at the most with Men." The arguments for equality are still valid in all democratic societies and few of these feminist demands for equal rights (mainly to education and professional employment) have been adequately met. But the demands for equality are permeated with something more radical still.

I will select three aspects of the seventeenth-century feminists' arguments that make it clear this was the beginning of political feminism: first, in rejecting women as naturally different from men they are forced to define women as a distinct *social* group with its own socially defined characteristics; second, as a result of this they see that men *as a social group* oppress women as a social group—they are not against men as such but against the social power of men, women's oppression as they put it being due to "the Usurpation of Men, and the Tyranny of Custom"; and finally, while they want to be let into men's privileged sphere they also want men to learn something from women; though they wouldn't have used exactly these terms the feminization of men is as important as the masculinization of women—they do not undervalue female powers only their abuse. In the quotation from the anonymous author that I have just cited we should note that there are two clauses: she wants to be equal to men *and* her arguments have endeavored "to reduce the Sexes to a Level." There is a current Chinese slogan that says "anything a man can do a woman can do,

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too''; feminism in the seventeenth century, as today, would add: ''anything a woman can do a man can do too''—though the seventeenth-century terms for this sexual ''leveling'' are slightly different.

The mental agility of women is valuable. ''I know'' (writes our anonymous author) ''our Opposers usually mis-call our Quickness of Thought, Fancy and Flash, and christen their own Heaviness by the specious Names of Judgement and Solidity: but it is easy to retort upon 'em the reproachful ones of Dulness and Stupidity with more Justice,'' and she goes on to claim that potentially the women's world of care-for-others could be as much a repository of the highest values of civilization as the men's world of pursuing material gain. There is nothing in itself wrong with domesticity. It is only women's enforced exclusive confinement thereto and men's self-imposed exclusion therefrom that creates the evil; but given this exclusiveness then indeed it is evil. As the Duchess of Newcastle wrote in 1662:

> . . . men are so unconscionable and cruel against us, as they endeavour to Barr us all Sorts or kinds of Liberty, as not to suffer us Freely to associate amongst our own sex, but, would fain Bury us in their houses or Beds, as in a Grave; the truth is, we live like Bats or owls, Labour like Beasts, and Dye like worms.

The early feminists do not consciously congregate as a political movement but they do propose to establish female groups usually for educational and self-educational purposes—they want to develop ''friendship'' among women. (The concept of female friendship is very close to that of ''sisterhood'' as it is advocated in the Women's Movement today.) Clearly a larger rebellion crossed their minds. As Mary Astell writes:

> . . . women are not so well united as to form an Insurrection. They are for the most part Wise enough to Love their Chains, and to discern how very becomingly they sit. They think as humbly of themselves as their Masters can wish, with respect to the other Sex, but in regard to their own, they have a Spice of Masculine Ambition, every one woul'd Lead, and none will Follow . . . therefore as to those Women who find themselves born for Slavery, and are so sensible of their own Meanness to conclude it impossible to attain to anything excellent, since they are, or ought to be, the best acquainted with their own Strength and Genius, She's a Fool who

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> would attempt their Deliverance and Improvement. No, let them enjoy the great Honor and Felicity of their Tame, Submissive and Depending Temper! Let the Men applaud, and let them glory in, this wonderful Humility!

It was left to later generations of women to try and devise a way of solving the problem of the masculine ambition to lead and of overcoming the apathy of feminine contentment—both are struggles that still continue. But less ironic and more strident than Mary Astell, the Duchess of Newcastle could wish she "were so fortunate, as to persuade you to make a frequentation, association, and combination amongst our sex, that we may unite in Prudent consuls, to make ourselves as Free, Happy and famous as Men. . . ." In fact a number of groups were formed and though they lacked the larger political unity and range of reference, such "frequentations" do bear some resemblance to the small groups which are the distinctive unit of organization within feminism today.

The seventeenth-century feminists are today frequently criticized for only wanting the liberation of the women of their own social class. Certainly whenever they explicitly thought of the laboring classes, it did not occur to them to consider that their own demands for access to education, the world of business and the professions were strikingly inappropriate for women (or men) of a lower class. When they talked of freeing "half the world" they were oblivious of class differences. Yet I think to criticize them for being blinkered by their bourgeois vision is ahistorical and inaccurate. Insofar as they came from the revolutionary class of that epoch and that they pointed out the oppressions that still existed, they did speak for all women. I said earlier that at the point where it is challenging an old order a revolutionary class speaks a universalistic language initially on behalf of all oppressed groups. If this is true in general it must be true for women—the seventeenth-century feminists appealed in a universalistic language on behalf of women to the highest concepts of freedom and humanity of which their society was capable. Even the very precepts of revolutionary change, in any era, cannot transcend the social conditions that give rise to them. In demanding entry into a male world, the end of men's social oppression of women, and equality *between* the sexes the women were truly revolutionary. They had explanations but they did not have a theory of how women came to be an oppressed social group; but still today we lack any such full

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theoretical analysis. They understood clearly enough that in their own time they were being made to live like bats and they saw the contradictions between this oppression and the ideology of liberty and equality; at that historical point to go beyond such insight and such forceful protest could only be millenarianism—as they well knew. In a final dedication of her book on marriage to the Queen, Mary Astell addresses the future: "In a word, to those Halcyon, or if you will *Millenium* Days, in which the Wolf and the Lamb shall feed together, and a Tyrannous Domination which Nature never meant, shall no longer render useless if not hurtful, the Industry and Understanding of half Mankind!"

When feminism next really reached a new crescendo, with Condorcet and Mary Wollstonecraft and the French Revolution, it was the hurtfulness not the uselessness of the oppression of women that was uppermost in the writers' minds. The principles were clear; Condorcet was emphatic in stating them. "Either no member of the human race has real rights, or else all have the same; he who votes against the rights of another, whatever his religion, colour or sex, thereby adjures his own." It is as bad to be tyrants as to be slaves. Men and women are degraded by the oppression of women. But what is new to the argument, and best expressed in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is the constant analysis of the damage done to women and therefore to society by conditioning them into inferior social beings. The theme is present in the seventeenth century, but a hundred years of confirmation has made its mark: "femininity" has been more clearly defined as fragility, passivity, and dependence—economic and emotional. Wollstonecraft inveighs against such false refinement:

> In short, women, in general . . . have acquired all the follies and vices of civilization, and missed the useful fruit . . . Their senses are inflamed, and their understandings neglected, consequently they become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling. Civilized women are therefore so weakened by false refinement, that, respecting morals, their condition is much below what it would be were they left in a state near to nature.

Between the end of the seventeenth and the end of the eighteenth century it would seem that among the middle classes the social

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definition of sexual differences had been more forcefully asserted; the behavioral characteristics of "masculinity" and "femininity" had drawn further apart. Behind Wollstonecraft's energetic analysis is a struggle with which we are still familiar: if a woman strives not to fall for the lure of feminine subservience she is labelled "masculine," in which case what happens to her legitimate femininity or "femaleness"? How can one be a woman, indeed womanly, and avoid the social stereotypes? The answer is a concept of humanity which more urgently unifies the social characteristics of men and women:

> A wild wish has just flown from my heart to my head, and I will not stifle it, though it may excite a horse-laugh. I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates the behaviour.

In fact Wollstonecraft, while asserting equality as a human right, has to some degree moved away from what I have characterized as an essentially liberal position into one that we might describe as radical humanism. Though like the seventeenth-century writers her highest good is reason and she demonstrates that women are inferior because they have been subjugated—not as is usually argued that they are subjugated because they are inferior—yet there is a new political dimension to her feminism. Where her English predecessors were demanding the practice consistent with the revolutionary values of their society, Wollstonecraft, living in the double context of by then reactionary Britain yet having the inspiration of the French Revolution, wanted not a change *within* society but a change *of* society:

> I do not believe that a private education can work the wonders which some sanguine writers have attributed to it. Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in . . . . It may . . . fairly be inferred, that, till society be differently constituted, much cannot be expected from education.

and:

> Rousseau exerts himself to prove that all *was* right originally: a crowd of authors that all *is* now right: and I, that all *will be* right.

In Wollstonecraft the millenium has come down firmly from heaven to earth.

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The writer to whom I wish to refer finally in this sketch of the relationship between feminism and the concept of equality is John Stuart Mill. To offer a somewhat sweeping generalization, after Mill, in England the feminist struggle moves from being predominantly the utterances of individuals about a philosophical notion of equality to being an organized political movement for the attainment, among other things, of equal rights. Of course, the one does not exclude the other, it is a question of emphasis.

In a lucid and powerful manner, Mill's essay, "The Subjection of Women" (1869), written at the height of the Victorian repression of women, resumes with a new coherence the arguments with which we have become familiar. Thus he has a clear perspective on the argument that maddened the earlier writers, that women's characteristics and social status were "natural": "What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others," and, "So true is it that unnatural generally means only uncustomary, and that everything which is usual appears natural. The subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural." Mill also looks back with clarity on the history of democracy and of women's rights—or rather lack of them.

Where the seventeenth-century women looked to their own new society for change and Wollstonecraft, with the example of the first radical years of the French Revolution at hand, looked to change her society, Mill, writing from within an industrial capitalism that had hardened into fairly extreme conservatism, had to stand aside and argue from the best of the past and the hope of the future. Most importantly, the justice and morality he wants have not yet been found in the world: "Though the truth may not yet be felt or generally acknowledged for generations to come, the only school of genuine moral sentiment is society between equals," and, "We have had the morality of submission, and the morality of chivalry and generosity; the time is now come for the morality of justice."

But Mill's lucidity, unlike Wollstonecraft's exuberance, forces him to constrict his own vision. Although at one moment he speculates that the reason why women are denied equal rights in society at large is because men must confine them to the home and the family, he does not pursue the implications of this insight and instead program-

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matically demands these rights. When it comes down to it, his equality is, quite realistically, equality under the law:

> . . . on women this sentence is imposed by actual law, and by customs equivalent to law. What, in unenlightened societies, colour, race, religion or, in the case of a conquered country, nationality, are to some men, sex is to all women; a peremptory exclusion from almost all honourable occupations, but either such as cannot be fulfilled by others, or such as those others do not think worthy of their acceptance.

and:

> . . . the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement.

I am not arguing against Mill's position but trying to indicate a lack that is implicit in this perspective. Mill's concept of human beings that are freed from the artificial constraints of a false masculinity or femininity is somehow more abstract than that of the earlier feminists. The seventeenth-century women thought if men and women were equal they could gain some quality from each other; Mary Wollstonecraft's vision combined in one being the best of a female world with the best of a male world. Mill correctly argues that we cannot know what men and women will be like when released from present stereotypes, but out of this correctness comes an elusive feeling that Mill, seeing so accurately women's horrendous subordination, failed to see their contribution. This turns on the question of the importance of the reproduction and care of human life—Mill does not see, as Wollstonecraft does, that there might be a gain in men really becoming fathers (instead of remote, authoritarian figureheads) as well as in women being freed to pursue the so-called "masculine" virtues. That Mill's concept of humanity is abstract, that he did not seem to consider the contribution of "femaleness" once freed of its crippling exclusiveness to women, may have been because he was a man; it may just as easily have been because of the different social circumstances from which he wrote. Because he was not living at the moment when the bourgeoisie

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was the revolutionary class, the universalistic aspect of such thought of which I spoke earlier must turn to abstraction—there is no other way in which it can refer to all people.

John Stuart Mill in a sense expresses the best and the last in the high liberal tradition. His ideals represent the best his society is capable of but they can no longer be felt to represent that society—as a consequence there is a sort of heroic isolation to his philosophy. Because of his isolation, because of his abstraction, in this field Mill's thought pinpoints and "fixes" the essence of liberalism:

> The old theory was, that the least possible should be left to the individual agent; that all he had to do should, as far as practicable, be laid down for him by superior powers. Left to himself he was sure to go wrong. The modern conviction, the fruit of a thousand years of experience, is that things in which the individual is the person directly interested, never go right but as they are left to his own discretion; and that any regulation of them by authority except to protect the rights of others, is sure to be mischievous. This conclusion, slowly arrived at, and not adopted until almost every possible application of the contrary theory has been made with disastrous result, now (in the industrial department) prevails universally in the most advanced countries, almost universally in all that have pretensions to any sort of advancement. It is not that all processes are supposed to be equally good, or all persons to be equally qualified for everything; but that freedom of individual choice is now known to be the only thing which procures the adoption of the best processes, and throws each operation into the hands of those who are best qualified for it.

Mill's philosophy is an overriding belief in the individual and in the right of the individual to fulfill his or her maximum potential, Mill's concept of equality is therefore an equality of opportunity. As a politician he fought for equal rights for women under the law.

Since Mill wrote there has been, I think—in an uneven way—a decline in the tradition of liberal thought. Today, exactly three-quarters of the way through the twentieth century, "equality" would seem to have become a somewhat unfashionable concept. Equal rights are still strenuously fought for but equality as the principle of a just and free society rarely elicits the eloquent support it once received. I am neither a philosopher nor a political scientist and I am ill-equipped to

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analyze why this should be the case. I can, however, point to some observations we all might make.

The concept of equality as a high ideal flourishes as a revolutionary aspiration when it is confronted with two types of conservatism—as Mill's was in Victorian England. One type of conservatism is a direct reflection of the economic conditions of a society once the society had settled down after its revolutionary open-endedness. When class distinctions have rigidified, then the conservative ideology of capitalism can bear a striking resemblance to the old order the revolutionary bourgeoisie once overthrew. In its naked crudity this conservatism is found in Arthur Young's statement: "... everyone but an idiot knows that the lower classes must be kept poor, or they will never be industrious," or in a verse of a hymn popular in England in the years before the First World War:

> The rich in his castle,
> The poor man at his gate,
> God made them high or lowly
> And ordered their estate.

The best liberal traditions of liberty, equality, and individualism such as those represented by Mill rarely engaged directly with conservatism of this sort, but their presence as an alternative *within* the same society hopefully acts to circumscribe the possible power of such reactionary stances.

There is another conservative tradition that is more testing for the liberal conception of individualism and equality and that is Tory radicalism. Where conservative conservatism argues that there are generic differences which must be the basis of differences between groups of people, Tory radicalism, like liberalism and, for that matter, socialism and communism, argues that there are differences between individuals. The litmus test here for establishing a distinction between the political philosophies is to see what happens to these individual differences. Tory radicalism always offers a place in the past, a romantic golden age when society was small enough for all these differences to flourish—merely as differences, be they handicaps or advantages. The liberal concept that I have presented here argues that we are all different but these differences can only be realized in their infinite variety if we are given equal opportunities to make what we individual-

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ly and differently can of them. The socialist and communist perspective suggests that "equality" in capitalist society is based on class inequality; in a classless society there will still be differences or inequalities, inequalities between individuals, strengths or handicaps of various kinds. There will be differences between men and women, differences among women and among men; a truly just society based on collective ownership and equal distribution would take these inequalities into account and give more to those who needed more and ask for more from those who could give more. This would be a true recognition of the individual in the qualities that are essential to his humanity.

When the liberal concept of equality—the ideal of a revolutionary bourgeoisie—has to oppose not conservatism, as it did in Mill's case, but a system of thinking such as that of socialism which looks to a new future, then its own radicalism is weakened and that is what has been happening in a somewhat sporadic fashion since the last part of the last century.

A crisis in the history of the concept of equality can, I think, be marked by one book that epitomizes the problem: the publication of the Halley Stewart lectures that the socialist historian R.H. Tawney gave in 1929. The book, entitled *Equality*, is a most moving document—a humanitarian plea for equality as, quite simply, a correct, indeed *the* correct principle of civilization. The framework within which Tawney argues for equality is that of moral and ethical philosophy; the terms in which he assesses the progress of equality are those of poverty and disparity of opportunity particularly in education. There is no underlying analysis of a class-antagonistic society and even in the lengthy epilogue written in 1950 the racial minorities in Britain are not mentioned, the position of women is not hinted at. Yet Tawney's own recommendations transcend the limitations of his belief in equality: he must argue for redistribution of wealth and for more collective provision of social services. His argument follows the liberal tradition but starts to look beyond it and sees that the freedom of privilege must be controlled; freedom in a class society is freedom for one class to exploit another.

It was not malicious oversight that made Tawney fail to see women as a deprived group—when he was writing women were simply not seen as a group at all. Ten years before he wrote and roughly fifteen

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years after his epilogue they were seen as a group once more. Feminism had in both cases pointed to the fact. In 1974, using the very criteria by which Tawney estimated the march of equality—poverty—a survey carried out in Britain found that women were the single most impoverished social group. The survey was not carried out by feminists, but feminism had made the investigators conscious of this category: women were found both to be a distinct group and an underprivileged one.

The fight for equal rights for women today takes place against this weakening of the liberal conception of equality. This talk is a plea both to remember that ideal and to realize its limitations. Too many revolutionary groups would skip the present and think that given both a falseness in the conception and its ultimate unrealizeability, "equality" is not something to be fought for: too many not-so-revolutionary groups think that equal rights are attainable under class-antagonistic systems and are adequate. Equal rights will always only be rights before the law but these have by no means been won yet nor their possible extent envisaged. A new society that is built on an old society that, within its limits, has reached a certain level of equality clearly is at a better starting point than one that must build on a society predicated on privilege and unchallenged oppression. At a more general level, there seems to me no doubt that civilization and human dignity is better served by as many people having as many rights as possible.

We are saddened by the death of

George L.K. Morris

a friend and member of our advisory board.

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POEMS

John Hollander

THE VIEWER

In the room of your dream even
A senseless instrument like this
Seemed wholly natural: lenses,
Neat body, and squared-off sets of
Hairlines for framing a round world
Within right angles. The problem
When you awoke was not the room
Of joy you had been in but what
Was given you there to perceive
It with—and what to do with it.
First, it mattered that it took no
Photos, like the dream itself had
Needs be used only then and there;
It was no mirroring globe which
Seemed a world of glass, like the round
Mirror Britomart found waiting
In her father's closet; it was
No teloptic picture like the
One from which Pamina peered out
At her seer; was no window
Into a small, bright room in which
A passerby might see held in
The momentary mullions of
Its frame young Van Dyke promising

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Nothing in particular save
That his image would not fade with
Oncoming of awakening—
Though silvering behind the world's
Glass had faded in a time of
Brightening light: that glass became
Transparent and long since has lost
Its ability to reflect.
In our time we have come to see
Through the glass, to want to enter
The bright ball whose bottom is deep
In its center—So that even
To have carried back the viewer
Intact from the lovely chamber
Of your sleep like some insistent
Rare seashell, is to be left quite
Stranded on this shore of meanings
Where the uses of things harden
Underfoot even as we walk
Slowly up the refusing dunes.
It would reduce your yellow room
To its own neat scale; it could not
Take a picture but at best could
Borrow one. The viewer you need
Would have to show what you cannot
See without it, the transparent
Fiction purely dwelling among
All the furnishings of space. So
That one only need report what
The viewer showed; one's disclosures
Would have the glassiness of clear
Inventory; they would need no
Busy surfaces, worked up with
Splendid energies; they would need
No urgent frame. They would live in
Reviewing their originals.
Thus if your dreams one week were all
Of water, lost in the sieve of

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Waking, no way of perceiving
Would vanish in mist; there would be
Transparency still, through, and of,
Which there would be the light, the light
Of what is to be seen, sounding
Through the clear bell of where you are.

Brad Gooch

A LETTER WRITTEN BY JOHN KEATS

The fact is I must take a walk; for I am writing so long a letter to George; and have been employed at it all morning. You will ask, have I heard from George. I am sorry to say not the best news—I hope for better—This is the reason among others that if I write to you it must be in such a scraplike way. I have no meridian to date interests from, or measure circumstances—To-night I am all in a mist; I scarcely know what's what. But you knowing my unsteady & vagarish disposition, will guess that all this turmoil will be sealed by tomorrow morning. It strikes me tonight that I have led a very odd sort of life for the two or three last years.

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Douglas Crase

AMERICA BEGAN IN HOUSES

Unlike the other countries, this one
Begins in houses, specific houses and the upstairs room
Where constitutions vibrate in the blockfront drawers,
A Queen Anne highboy, or maybe the widow's walk
On a farmhouse hundreds of miles inland and believed
By the family to be a lookout for Indians though clearly
It was a pioneer's conceit, fresh as the latest politics
From home: so much for that innocent thesis *The Frontier.*
No, between the houses and the people living in them
Ought to be a view as easy to pick out from the road
As the traditional six-over-six of a double window sash,
And just as functional. Occasionally, when this meeting
Of artifice and artifact occurs, a national monument
Is declared, but to visit it afterward is invariably
To be dismayed: could they really have planted lilacs
By the door, had Sheraton sideboards when they were the rage,
Stencilled the dining room till only the wainscot
Had been spared? How touchingly people embrace the styles
Which look in retrospect like individual good taste.
Still, they lived with them and that was long enough
That it continues having its effect. It's been said
Of a house that it's the carapace of a soul: perhaps,
But not always of the occupant any more than the shell
Of a hermit crab can be said to be his own. It takes
Some growing into, or making over, here and in the houses
Scattered one by one in individual commonplace yards.
The squirrels come in on the wires, bringing their news.
The lilacs move over first for spruce and lately, everywhere
One looks, for rhododendrons. Strangely, as the pilgrim
Aspirations increase they seem to diminish in promise
Yet who can say that out of these borrowed fashions
Won't come a suburban mutant enlarging nature
Once again. The Federal fanlight opens in the sun
And on the gateleg table is a treaty to be signed.

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Three Poems by Kenneth Koch

GETTING BACK ON LAND

The arms of those armchairs resemble the legs
Of young women who have just come over
From the coast of America in a tramp steamer;
They sing happily of the long days of their voyage
And they are glad to see the armchairs again, which remind
them of their legs.

MATTERS

At eight o'clock the torn apron was willing
To depart with her lover, the cleaning;
But at the stroke of nine exactly
He was already tired of her and had gone to the hearing
Of sunshine and beautiful ways.

PASSAGE

A boat comes by, captain smiling, lady on his arm
Tatooed there by Plush the Pirate; I wish I were here with you
Written on the paper beneath his pen. Boat goes by with a
frown.

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John Koethe

DOROTHY WORDSWORTH

All my life
I've meant something I don't really know how to say—
Roughly, that *now* and *then* and *here* and *there*
Are different times and places, but not different ways of
doing things;
And that every time and place is so dense
It can't hold any of the others,
But only sits next to them.
It's as though the "knowledge of experience"
Were that experience didn't matter all that much,
And that what I thought and meant and wanted
Didn't make very much difference, and that the past was
a demonstration
Of how little weight the soul actually has.

And yet I still like most of the things
I used to like in high school, and I still think
Some of those wonderful, vague things *are* me.
I guess the things one has always liked
Don't have much to do with what one is, was, or ultimately
becomes—
But I feel lost without them.
Fixed on something so far away my whole
Life seems prolonged out of proportion to the real world,
Things float in and stop and try to talk to me
And I agree with everything they say, though their voices
aren't mine anymore:
"It's getting awfully late. And we've all
Been up for a long time. In just a little while
All of us are going to be sound asleep."

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Sometimes I can almost visualize my life
As a succession of those states—
Feelings of finitude, inklings of infinity
And the occasional breath of a human detail—
And it terrifies me to think that those moments could comprise
everything I was ever actually going to feel.
But Dorothy Wordsworth went about her chores
In the throes of a dependency "so greatly loved
And so desperately clung to that it couldn't risk anything
But a description of the scenery in which it was lived;"
And somehow accomplished her imagination—
And the long walks her brother took
In a phase of mind at one remove from description
Seem almost tangible now, and as funny and real
As the minutiae of real life.
Only they seem "absolutely small."

Puffy-lidded, doe-eyed,
With the detachment that characterizes
The fanatic, to whom nights and days are like children's
stories
That don't explain anything but, taken together,
Make a fundamental kind of sense,
The sense of the mirror—
I thought I'd composed my life
Around a series of weightless moments,
And that each moment culminated in one of those remarks
People made at home, or overheard,
Or lost track of in a conversation,
And which were supposed to be as light as feathers.
But now I don't think anything like that ever really
transpired at all.

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Kate Farrell

STAYING HERE

like a train cutting
past posts in a hurry
and little tunnel lights
like cathedral music
in the afternoon like
antique glass with curves
at the top and smooth
stripes like a V in
the road with zinnias
between not a thin
black man with red roses
but a shop with potatoes
and fruit in crates
and under the canopy
apple sized plums
like old wooden doors
where the doorman sits
and from three flights
up through the open window
all the yellow leaves
in the park below
like a river you look
out at not fences but
rectangles and arches
like painted radiators
and house fronts yellow
as a ceiling light and
green like a window box
or whistling at a corner
when it's not very far
like steps that turn back
at the middle on the way
to the roof where there
are three grayish birds
waiting like cranes on a

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Sunday beside gravel or
a 10-year-old girl who
has just washed her hair
like boys running ahead
of long shadows and the
shadow of a balcony at
night on the sidewalk
like autumn when it's
just begun like wide
boards on a floor and
closets and copper like
shelves of old books
as if they were yours

Roberto Echavarren

GLOSSOLALIA

you cut your tongue like a violin
in Ekbatana, a yarn of silk on the spotted neck
the rebuff over the osier, between
the swollen lips, fairly wet
of Elvis Presley
that's the glossamer, get someone snig in
Mackie the Spaghettown
of that vision there was plenty in my dream
forest's murmurs, bluebird's detritus
one word of the prophezied on the subway hall
which isn't anything on a free trial basis
makes it entirely up to you
lofty, from aloft the rainbow, Krakatoa
a memory, although I told my mamma:
just like the wind, well, the fragmentary cup
matter/antimatter, go to daddy, she was fishing
nigger

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James Schuyler

GROWING DARK

The grass shakes.
Smoke streaks, no,
cloud strokes.
The dogs are fed.
Their licenses
clank on pottery.
The phone rings.
And is answered.
The pond path
is washed-out grass
between green
winter cover.
Last night in
bed I read.
You came to
my room and
said, "Isn't
the world
terrible?" "My
dear. . . . ." I
said. It could be
and has been
worse. So
beautiful and
things keep getting
in between. When
I was young I
hurt others. Now,
others have hurt
me. In the night
I thought I heard
a dog bark.
Racking sobs.
Poor guy. Yet,
I got my sleep.

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Kenward Elmslie

SIAMESE STANDPIPE

You silly thing to fear you bore me
by very things I like to hear about:
beautiful women on crutches walking
by open-air abattoir into Doll House,
the two of us bread-and-buttering our
way past lamp-posts in the cloudburst,
peg-leg gal (high ked) is entering
Double Header, 2nd Ave near Yeller.
Here's a fluke: lucky 'ol sun beams
on: pastern, pinbone, heart girth,
as gal nearing the ultimate passes
through swinging doors of Johnny's
Handlebar Mustachio, young crowd.

Empty space where her extremities
once pranced, eye-patch. Give—
looking for give, soft Chinese walls,
which eye-patches do, clamped into
place, drench passersby. Another
peg-leg pushing into Eleven Eleven
Tavern. Fell off cliff, mid-embrace,
mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, high
tension wires crackle. Cane as pun.
Stack. Haystack. Atlas Baths, 4th
Floor. With them lined up outside,
stumps covered with rubber. Horizon
delightful! Any statistician partial
to slump dips and what they represent
in human terms: shifts in demented
contingencies of the fall-back variety.
Beams down on nightclub pallor meat.

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David Schloss

WEST TEXAS

They pitched about like tumbleweeds
Until she blew into his arms.
Next day she saw him, newly wed,
Holding heavy stones in his hands:

Such stones on that plain once had lived,
Then died, splitting their foundations,
Releasing their dessication
To those who would come among them.

He kneaded sand like a surgeon
Of water on the flat dry land,
In all the holes picked clean of stones
Removed then rolled back over them.

Then he leaped up and bought a cow:
On its back the ticks were flying,
Like thoughts behind his dusty eyes—
But still there was something missing . . .

In an aura of late, last light
She found herself widowed one day,
Family albums, treasures buried,
Secret inside a bureau drawer.

She lived on alone, devoting
Herself to the reconstruction
Of the vision of his life from
Dead soil in which nothing could grow,

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Recalling that memory of him
Those days working out in the fields
He was planning on planting in
The solar wind—then flowering,

Like a bowl hung from the ceiling
Of sky, casting him in its glow—
In her eyes, her lids closed on death,
A shadow she would enter then.

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A.J. Liehm

KAFKA AND HIS COMMUNIST CRITICS

I.

On May 27-28, 1963, an international symposium on the life and work of Franz Kafka was held near Prague at the Liblice Castle, which is owned by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. There have been dozens of international conferences on Kafka, so this bare fact would not be particularly significant if it were not for certain features which made this gathering different from all the others.

First, it was held in the country where Kafka was born and spent practically his entire life and where, until 1963, he was little read and generally regarded as a decadent and harmful influence. Second, this was a conference of Communist Marxists, a branch of contemporary thought which over the years has gone to a lot of trouble to try to make the world forget that Kafka had ever existed. The Liblice Conference thus amounted to a public affirmation that, at least as far as Kafka was concerned, the Communist Marxists had been wrong. It marked their recognition of him as a writer.

Thus, in itself, the conference was an important political milestone in the evolution of European political thought during the 1960s. And in Czechoslovakia it meant even more. It became one of the signals for far-reaching changes within the country's social, political, and cultural structures which reached a climax five years later, during the first eight months of 1968. Almost prophetically, Roger Garaudy, one of the principal participants, entitled his article about the conference in *Les Lettres françaises* "Le Printemps de Prague"—Prague Spring.

What really happened at Liblice? The whole story is full of paradoxes—comic and tragic, as paradoxes often are. To understand it better let us back up a year, to July 1962, when Jean-Paul Sartre addressed the Moscow Congress for Peace and Disarmament. Sartre decided to use this particular forum to speak his mind about a unity of cultures, about the need for disarmament in the cultural sphere. These were exceedingly explosive words at that time (what-

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ever they may seem many years after and in another context) when there were constant reminders that while the Cold War may have ended, a "relentless ideological struggle" would still go on. Sartre told the Congress:

> Our guilt is great. We have all these many sins on our conscience because we are living at a time when culture is used as a weapon. . . . Take Kafka for example. This brilliant author was Jewish. He was tortured by the fate of the Jewish community in Prague during the Hapsburg reign and during the early years of the bourgeois Czechoslovak Republic. Gnawed by family conflicts and religious disagreements, the testimony he left us is all the more universal because it is so deeply individual. But what have our critics done? From the way they have described his books, one would think they were hoping they would explode in the hands of Russian readers. They started insisting that bureaucracy is an inevitable sin of socialism—as though this weren't one of the vices of every industrialized society. Then they identified Kafka as an author who derided and exposed bureaucrats. After such an introduction, all they needed to do was to ship him off to the Russians, in hopes that now everybody would recognize their own country when they'd read *The Trial*. It wouldn't have mattered so much if this deliberately aggressive attitude had not called forth a defensive response which, no matter how understandable in itself, was belligerent: —Well, if these books are supposed to offend us, then we needn't translate them! The result? Almost half a century has passed since *The Trial* was written and many people in a country which stands in the forefront of social, scientific, and technical progress have never even heard of Kafka. Thus, a double injustice has been committed against this author. In the West he is distorted and misconstrued and in the East he is passed over in silence.

Echoing Sartre, Professor Eduard Goldstuecker, head of the German department at Charles University and later chairman of the Czechoslovak Union of Writers, points out that after World War II "the official cultural position of the socialist countries was a sharp rejection of Kafka as a decadent antirationalist, as a divisive force out of place in a society intent on building socialism." As a result, Goldstuecker goes on to say:

> From 1948 to 1957, nothing written by or about Kafka was published [in Czechoslovakia], except for some indirect assaults in pamphlet form. It was only after the Twentieth Congress that sporadic articles started appearing, and even then there was the feeling that these represented something forbidden or at best barely tolerated. Sartre's statements at the Moscow Peace Congress of 1962, in which he called for the demilitarization of culture, had an important effect on further developments. Kafka was the very case in point he cited. . . . In short, Kafka had become a central point in the battle for breaking down the isolation caused by years of Stalinism and the Cold War.

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Although Sartre's address was not published in the USSR, it was brought to Prague by artist and author Adolf Hoffmeister, a friend of Sartre's and a member of the Czechoslovak delegation to the Peace and Disarmament Congress. Its publication in Prague stirred interest in Kafka, which at first manifested itself in a proposal for a meeting of Czechoslovak and Soviet literary critics to deal with the Kafka question. Soon, however, the authors of the original proposal—among whom Professor Goldstuecker was the most prominent—raised their sights somewhat higher. They passed the word that a conference was to be held and invited all Eastern European countries to send representatives, then sat back to await the response. When there were no objections from Moscow they proceeded to extend invitations to a number of eminent Communist Marxists from the West. Among those who attended were Garaudy, at the time a member of the politbureau of the French Communist Party, Ernst Fischer, who was then on the Central Committee of the Austrian Communist Party, and Roman Karst, the Polish critic and German scholar who was at the time deputy editor-in-chief of the Warsaw literary review *Tworczosc*. Moscow promised to send four or five participants, but a few days before the conference started a telegram arrived saying that only one person would be coming. In the end, he didn't come either.

Although the Liblice Conference aroused considerable international interest, its initial repercussions in those countries with a censored press were restricted to just a handful of the initiated. Thirty-four hundred copies of the proceedings of the conference were published one year later and official reaction in the press was limited to a few bland commentaries and facts about who participated and about the closing reception. The overwhelming majority of the fourteen million Czechs and Slovaks hadn't even realized that a conference had been held in their country about this writer who had been born in Prague and written in German. Most of them had never even heard of him. There seemed little hope of changing this.

But as often happens, help came from the least expected quarter. The "comrades in the German Democratic Republic," where, as we shall see, hostility to Kafka ran deep, had not said their last word. Alfred Kurella, who was then chief of the ideological department of the East German Communist Party, was infuriated by Prague's revisionism "in Sache Kafka." He gave vent to his wrath in four pages of the East Berlin cultural weekly *Sonntag*, under a headline paraphrasing Garaudy's article on the Liblice Conference in *Les Lettres françaises*. Garaudy and Fischer were the main targets of his attack. But it was not until later that the connection between the absence of Soviet representatives, the role of the East German delegation (which will be discussed later), and Kurella's proxy attack in *Sonntag* on two top West European Communists became apparent. In 1970 Kurella was an official

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delegate of the East German Communist Party at the French Communist Party Congress which expelled Garaudy.

But all that was still in the future. When Kurella's article originally appeared, *Sonntag* had the advantage—or disadvantage—of being an exceedingly boring product of official journalism which nobody read, even in East Germany. In contrast, *Literarni Noviny*, the weekly published by the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, was an exceptionally good newspaper with a circulation of 140,000. It always sold out as soon as it reached the newsstands. Kurella's article in *Sonntag* provided *Literarni Noviny* with a unique opportunity to tell its readers about what had really happened at Liblice and to make Kafka's rehabilitation in Eastern Europe not just a matter of literary interest, but a political event as well.

Literarni Noviny published a translation of the full text of Kurella's article. At first the censors, who were too obtuse to realize what was going on, were delighted; they never expected such cooperation and understanding from the editors of *Literarni Noviny*, of all people. But readers in Prague were shocked. Kurella's dogmatism and his vulgarized version of Marxism, not to mention his language, were at that time already like a voice out of another century. What was more, the article was published with a footnote inviting rebuttals by those whom Kurella had attacked. Indeed, their replies were already on the editor's desk.

Fischer, Garaudy, Pavel Reiman, a charter member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and others involved "in Sache Kafka" not only told Kurella what they thought of him, his article, and his methods, but also gave their own views on literature, Marxism, socialism, alienation in a socialist society, and so on. Their replies went out in the 140,000 copies of *Literarni Noviny* and reached almost half a million Czechs and Slovaks out of a total population of almost fourteen million.

The Czechs and Slovaks could hardly believe their eyes. Most of them knew nothing about Kafka, or very little. But now, in a newspaper debate which had started about an author who had evidently lived in the same kind of society as they did, had had many of the same experiences, had found things just as puzzling, and in general had felt the same way they did, truths were suddenly being told which hadn't been uttered for the past twenty years. Soon Kafka became the most popular author in the country where he had been born. Thousands of these people had never even heard of *The Trial, The Castle*, or *Metamorphosis*, but now, when they got together in their offices or shops or in the streetcar and confronted man's alienation and the way they were all being manipulated by society in their daily lives, they would cast up their eyes and confide in a whisper to the first stranger they met, "This is just like Kafka!"

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Soon Kafka was being published in editions of tens of thousands of copies and every new volume sold out before the first review came out in the papers. People wanted to understand the kind of world they were living in, what determined the parameters of their lives, and what their purpose was—if there were any purpose at all in this society. And they hoped that Franz Kafka would be able to give them an answer. Many were probably disappointed in the end, because they found no formula for escaping from their vicious circle. But certainly Franz Kafka and the circumstances which led him to write helped them identify the situation and orient themselves in it.

And what about Kafka in Prague today? Twelve years after Liblice he has, I suppose, become literature again. He has not lost any of the qualities of which Karst and Garaudy spoke, but he has ceased to be *res politica*. He could be that only as long as the Czechs and Slovaks could identify themselves with Surveyor K. and his anguished efforts to break down the wall and enter the Castle.

But they finally entered the Castle on the night of August 21, 1968, and during the days and months that followed. There is no mystery any more, no enigma, no inaccessible goal which they must reach. They no longer say, "This is just like Kafka!" Everybody knows by now that the Castle is empty, that there is nothing there for them—at least not what they had been looking for. Just crude power, military might. Police.

Which makes the answer to their questions that much easier and more concrete.

II

Among the speakers at Liblice was Roman Karst. In his lecture, entitled "An Attempt at Man's Salvation," he said:

> Kafka's parables destroy his heroes' illusions and their mistaken faith that they are living in a free and rational world which is governed by moral principles. On every side we hear tragic outcries against this era of lies and half-truths, laments about how history has failed, exhortations to lead a new kind of life. Kafka is an author of infinite negation, but certainly not of capitulation.

Karst's own path resembles that of a Kafka character. One of the melancholy intellectual "heroes of our time," he is a Jew from a country where, during the 1930s, the Communists were the only political party which would accept a Jew as a member. Poland's defeat in 1939 found him—"luckily"—in a part of the country which was occupied by the Soviet Army. Stalin im-

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mediately shipped him off to Siberia for seven years. Miraculously, he survived, returned to Warsaw after the war, joined the Social Democratic Party, and became a Communist when the two parties merged. In 1968 he was a warm supporter of "Prague Spring" and of the Polish students who were staging their own demonstrations at that time, during which his daughter Bronia was arrested. She spent several months in jail. He himself was officially recalled, fired from his teaching post at the university during the wave of anti-Semitism, and hounded by the police until finally he and his daughter were forced to emigrate. In 1969 he became a full professor of German literature at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

What follows are excerpts from a series of conversations between Professor Karst and the author:

Karst: First, we must realize that Kafka was accepted in different East European countries in different ways, at different times, and to differing degrees. In the German Democratic Republic they made a virtue out of necessity: they allowed Kafka into the living room but they made him stand in the corner. It was different in Hungary. While it was the "people" who opened the door for Kafka in Poland and Czechoslovakia, in Budapest he was declared *salonfähig* "from above." In other words, the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party decided that the time had come to liberalize their cultural policy and Kafka got the benefit of their decision. This was around 1964, when the Hungarian situation was an interesting compromise between the Soviet position and what developed later in Czechoslovakia and Poland.

In Poland Kafka's acceptance was conditioned on the one hand by the prewar evolution of Polish literature and on the other by postwar political developments. Kafka really emerged out of a world which had almost been forgotten since 1945. He had not been entirely unknown in Poland between the two world wars, of course. I found an article about him in a 1927 issue of *Wiadomosci Literackie*, a leading Warsaw journal. Kafka had his admirers in Polish literary circles. The most distinguished among them was Bruno Schulz, to whom we are indebted for his sensitive translation of *The Trial*, which was published in the 1930s. Schulz, one of the greatest Polish literary talents of that decade, was influenced by Kafka, but he never allowed himself to be submerged by him. Actually, Kafka is a very dangerous author, in the sense that he threatens to destroy all his admirers who do not succeed in defending their own independence. Bruno Schulz had too strong a literary personality to be able to ignore Kafka, but he was also too strong an individual to subordinate himself to Kafka.

In prewar Poland there was a vigorous avant-garde movement which was

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conducive to an interest in Kafka. Among the members of this movement were authors like S.I. Witkiewicz, Schulz, and Witold Gombrowicz, who represent three quite different artistic trends. All, like Kafka himself, were seeking new paths and new modes of expression. Personally, I think Kafka and Gombrowicz have a lot in common, although the world, which took tragic forms in Kafka's fantasy, was transformed into the grotesque in Gombrowicz's imagination.

I could give other examples, but it is enough if we say that the prewar literary situation facilitated Kafka's acceptance in Poland and assured him a readership which understood what he was trying to say. This natural process of rapprochement was interrupted by the war and, after that, by the Stalin era, which made Polish intellectual life so barren.

But beginning with 1955 doors were opened in Poland to Western authors, and eventually to Kafka too. Gradually translations of all his works appeared, along with a considerable amount of critical writing. The Polish Party leadership did not think there was any point in restricting the publication of Kafka's works. On the contrary, it favored any literature which did not deal with politics directly. And it continues to do so. Extremely experimental poetry enjoys the greatest sympathy among those who shape cultural policies in Poland today. The less it has to communicate the better.

Liehm: And in the Soviet Union?

Karst: There Kafka had a more difficult time of it. The Khrushchev era stimulated more interest in this author, who was practically unknown in Russia, and this resulted in an anthology which was published in 1965 and entitled *F. Kafka—Novels, Stories, and Parables*. As far as I know, this is all that has been published from Kafka in the USSR, and it is certainly the most extensive collection in Russian. Previously Kafka had been read only in very limited circles, by those who could read him in German, French, or English. There is a curious fact about this anthology. A book published in the Soviet Union usually mentions how many copies of it have been published. In this case the information was missing, an indication that the edition was probably very small. In other words, almost inaccessible. I know that when Soviet writers came to Warsaw they often tried to find a copy of this collection. I donated my own copy to one of them.

The Soviet anthology was published more for reasons of prestige than because the Russians were acknowledging Kafka's place in literature. It was simply a matter of erasing a blemish which was the fact that Kafka had never been published in Russian. The Soviet objections to him were both literary and political, as the arguments on Kafka always are. To this day, the so-called socialist-realist approach to the arts prevails in the USSR. This is the only recognized artistic method. Any rapprochement between Kafka and this kind

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of writing is impossible, of course, even if we'd stand on our heads. To admit Kafka into the Soviet literary consciousness would mean recognizing either openly or covertly the existence of a plurality, in literature at least. The first moves toward recognizing Kafka in the USSR came during the waning days of the Khrushchev era, but they never amounted to much because cultural policy froze up again as soon as Khrushchev disappeared from the scene.

Liehm: How do you explain this allergy to Kafka? Why not to Joyce, for instance?

Karst: We mustn't exaggerate the problem of Kafka in Russia. I don't know whether there is a complete translation of *Ulysses* in Russian, but I do know that there is a general tendency to translate primarily those foreign authors who are felt, in Soviet opinion, to be socially "progressive"—writers like Laxness, Pablo Neruda, and Howard Fast, until he became a heretic. Or else those who could be called "realists," like Hemingway, Böll, Steinbeck, Caldwell, Martin du Gard, Moravia, and the like. Kafka doesn't fit in either category. In addition, there is something else which plays a part. In Kafka's works, every sensitive reader can feel the revulsion against totalitarian attitudes, against manipulation and mystification, against totalitarianism in general. Kafka often expressed this revulsion in conversations with his friends. I remember what he once said to Gustav Janouch:

> Some kind of Napoleon always emerges at the end of every revolution. . . . The farther a flooding river overflows its banks, the dirtier and muddier its waters become. The revolution dries up too, and all that's left is the mud of a new bureaucracy. The shackles of tormented humanity are made of typing paper. . . . Secretaries, clerks, and professional politicians now stand behind the workers who once were masters of the streets and who paved the way to power for these modern sultans.

Liehm: The third country where Kafka has had a strange fate is the German Democratic Republic. . . .

Karst: Kafka's story in the GDR is so full of paradoxes that it's hard to believe. Until the Liblice Conference one of the greatest writers in the German language was virtually unknown in that country. I was often told that the attitude of the West German publisher who controlled his rights was a major obstacle to publishing Kafka in the GDR—along with his insistence that Kafka be published with Max Brod's introduction. This was rejected in the GDR. But that is only part of the truth. Later, when the East Germans finally decided to publish Kafka after all, a way was found to get around all these obstacles. The real reason is simply that Kafka was a bogie man. They were terrified of him.

This is clear from what happened at the Liblice Conference. The East

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Germans tried to use Thomas Mann to fight Kafka. They made Mann a symbol of progressive bourgeois literature acceptable to the working class and turned Kafka into a negative symbol of bourgeois art who represented a great danger for the working class. This artificial antithesis always puzzled me. Why should they favor Mann, who had always been strongly influenced by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner? Why Mann, the author of *Dr. Faustus*, one of the most pessimistic novels of the twentieth century, which prophesies the end of art and culture and humanistic thought? And why should Kafka be poison for the proletariat—the author of *The Penal Colony*, the prophet of the tragedy into which man is pushed by a totalitarian system, an author who has so convincingly described man's struggle for the victory of the true and the good? Yet the Mann-Kafka comparison was the main theme of the GDR delegation's remarks at Liblice.

But I'd like to go back a bit. The biggest paradox was really of comic proportions—if one can speak of comedy in such melancholy circumstances. Not a single work of Kafka's had ever been published in the German Democratic Republic—not a single short story or parable. But suddenly, within a short space of time, two books about Kafka appeared. In 1961 it was *Kafka—Weltbild und Roman* by Klaus Hermsdorf, and one year later, *Franz Kafka—Werk und Entwurf*, compiled by Helmut Richter. The East German reader thus found himself in a peculiar situation. He could read critical analyses about a German author whose works were inaccessible to him.

Both Hermsdorf and Richter were at Liblice and presented the official GDR line, which they had defended in their books. But it was only after the Liblice Conference that the importance which the GDR attached to Kafka was fully revealed. Two "fronts" had formed. The "pro-Kafka" front included representatives of many different types of literature and many countries. The GDR delegates were the only ones on the other side of the barricades. Their situation was very difficult, of course. I asked one of them quite frankly, "How can you talk such nonsense?" He glanced around, then hinted that if he could speak freely . . . but there was a high-ranking member of the East German Communist Party among the delegation who kept tabs on everybody and gave them their orders.

The conference had the greatest repercussions in two countries—Czechoslovakia in a positive sense, and negatively in the German Democratic Republic. The conference also found a negative response among the pro-Gomulka, pro-regime critics in Poland, and when I published an account of the conference's discussions they all backed the GDR position. But the overwhelming majority of Polish intellectuals deplored the attacks on Kafka. As for the Russians, they did not even take part in the argument. They hadn't published anything by Kafka before Liblice and they refused to publish him

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afterward too. (The anthology I mentioned before was just a brief and "semi-legal" episode.)

The point is that the Kafka battle was part of a whole struggle for a revival of society and culture. The East Germans, who were fighting to preserve old Stalinist and neo-Stalinist cultural policies, simply couldn't ignore Kafka, as the Russians did, and pretend that nothing had ever happened. He was a German writer of too great a stature to be silenced, particularly by second-rate literature. And this led to a paradoxical situation. They finally published Kafka and rejected him at the same time. They acknowledged him artistically but condemned him ideologically—as though an author can be split asunder from what he has written.

The East Germans had an easier job with Thomas Mann because almost all of his work is turned toward the past. *Buddenbrooks* is set in the nineteenth century, *Lotte in Weimar* goes back even farther, not to mention his *Joseph* trilogy. Even his most contemporary work, *Dr. Faustus*, ends with World War II. Besides, Mann limits his subject matter to the spiritual world of the bourgeoisie and intellectuals.

In comparison, Kafka's work has a universal frame. It cannot be limited in time, since it reaches into the past, through the present, and far ahead into the future. Its range is unlimited, touching on every facet of human existence. In a social sense, Kafka's work cannot be reduced to any clearly defined milieu. So each phenomenon Kafka describes somehow has to do with the present and the existing social situation. It is impossible to say about him, "What he has written has nothing to do with us, with our times and our problems." Unlike Thomas Mann, Kafka cannot be mummified and made into a "classic." In my opinion, these are the basic reasons for the bitter polemics which built up into such a sharp conflict between the East Germans and the liberal forces in other East European countries.

Liehm: In Prague today Kafka is not only accused of being decadent and destructive, but his Jewishness has also become an issue.

Karst: I'm not surprised. The vision of a Jewish vampire drinking the blood of burgeoning Czechoslovak socialism is quite consistent with the process which began with the invasion of Russian tanks. Since the Communist Party took on a fascist character in Poland during the 1960s and in Czechoslovakia after 1969, both countries are condemned to cultural barrenness and to misery. The most recent developments around the figure of Franz Kafka are just one example. But I still believe that both our nations, which have survived so much already, will survive this present tragedy too.

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Edith Kurzweil

THE MYTHOLOGY OF STRUCTURALISM

It is now several decades since STRUCTURALISM was launched by Levi-Strauss, and ever since then, its defenders have claimed that it answers many of the persistent questions about nature and culture, while its opponents have argued that it is just another piece of rhetoric masquerading as a supertheory. The discussions rage on, but whether it is a new vision or just a fad, structuralism provides the kind of ideology that can be useful to both the right and the left. For the French right, Levi-Strauss's belief in unconscious—yet immutable—structures confirms conservative views about the constants in all of existence, while the left finds an affinity with some of Levi-Strauss's pro-Marxist proclamations. But since 1968, with the growing political and economic crisis, the mystique of structuralism has lost its more general appeal, a number of "post-structuralist" theories have emerged, and Levi-Strauss's stock among French intellectuals has gone down. In the last few years, however, a few French intellectuals who still believe that some form of structuralism illuminates all of human activity have developed their own versions of structuralism, in different fields, and in competition with each other, so that one can now choose one's favorite variety—to support or knock down. In America though, where academics are always a few years behind the latest French fashions, structuralism—in one form or another—remains a hot issue at scholarly meetings where a longing for big theory persists—and this is only partly due to the long delay of translations.

But we still are not sure what we think of structuralism. How does the peculiar combination of analytic and mythical components, for example, fit in with the native empirical bent? Do we think of it as a contribution to modern thought, as a science, as a religion—or as simply a moment in the history of ideas? In what way—if any—does structuralism add to the understanding of literature, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and other disciplines? Does it answer any fundamental questions, or is it to be regarded as just another of the perennial French philosophical constructions like existentialism—a flashy insight built into a theory, or into the "form of thought

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analysis'' Levi-Strauss refers to. And do the recent applications of structuralism open up new disciplines or sub-disciplines? Or are they merely glosses or variations on the Grand Theory Levi-Strauss originally propounded? In addition, to what extent do delayed translations, such as, for instance, Piaget's *Structuralism*, with its emphasis on cybernetics and on ''permanent construction'' both further complicate and simplify our own mixed-up notions about the theory?

A definite judgment—or dismissal—of the Grand Theory may be premature. But even a preliminary effort to evaluate it is not made any easier by the theory's Olympian claim to universality or its overconstruction, or by the oversimplifications of its followers. Some of Levi-Strauss's interpretors, particularly, have fostered popular notions of structuralism which like popular notions of Marxism or psychoanalysis appear as their own caricatures; and the watered-down versions have entered the mainstream of popular high culture by becoming at the same time more palatable and less meaningful. Thus all the simplistic ''translations'' of structuralism into elementary notions of ''structures'' of the kind dealt with by superficial sociological and psychological approaches not only distort Levi-Strauss's views but, in doing so, diminish his stature. After all, we cannot hold Levi-Strauss responsible for the fact that terms like ''personality structure'' or ''social structure'' have become catchwords for those who keep up with the latest ideas.

Still, whatever the fate of structuralism, the fact is that Levi-Strauss is a seminal figure. His contributions to modern thought deserve more than the quick reading and parochial criticism that has been fed the general public, and though there has been a certain amount of valid and informed criticism from Functionalist, Positivist, Marxist, historical, and other kinds of perspectives, there have been few comprehensive analyses. A critique of structuralism requires at least a careful reading. Even if, as I believe, structuralism is dead, it deserves a proper burial.

I.

Levi-Strauss is easily misunderstood, even in French. But the problems are compounded for us by the inherent contradictions, linguistic as well as conceptual, between French metaphysics and American pragmatism. And because unconscious mental structures cannot be empirically demonstrated, even by French inductive reasoning, Levi-Strauss gets around the problem by creating structures on top of his basic theme, which is essentially a constant *search* for the fundamental structures of existence. The method he uses might be described as a kind of intellectual—or cultural—free association, by which he can jump from free-floating thoughts about the similarity of geological

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structures in France and in Brazil, to the quality of mind of the geologists themselves. Levi-Strauss is not unaware of his pursuit of truth by association, for he says of Freud that his flair for free association led not only to many of his insights but actually to his entire theory of psychoanalysis. This, it seems to me, is the source of most of his difficulties—this identification of his "method" with his intellectual habits, his associative powers. The result amounts almost to a methodological tautology, that is, one in which the demonstration of ideas lies in their connection. Nor are the difficulties resolved by describing them, as Levi-Strauss does in *Tristes Tropiques*, as "his own, special type of rigor." It is not surprising, therefore, that when the theory is questioned the person is also criticized, since the two are hopelessly intertwined. This confusion becomes particularly obvious at the end of his *Mythologiques*, where he constructs his ultimate "*tableau vivant*," to connect physical and psychic matter, with a *mélange* of "self-analysis" and what seems to me a "super-structuralism of structuralism".

Levi-Strauss was on safer ground when he first expanded on Mauss's theories to develop his structural anthropology which earned him his place at the *College de France*. But clearly, he shifted his style as well as his method in his later *Mythologiques*. As Levi-Strauss himself says, he "transforms" his childhood passion for collecting and sorting stones, pieces of glass, marbles, and whatever else might catch the eye of an imaginative child who can then, with thought and sensibility, construct all sorts of things into a *bricolage* of theories. And this grown-up *bricolage*—a whole that amounts to more than its parts—is, of course, vulnerable to all the criticism any such mixed bag would be subject to. It includes anthropological theories and Kant's basic *Anschauungen* with their unchangeable "givens" and it reinterprets specific parts of Marxism and Freudianism, and borrows from Durkheim's collective unconscious and from Koehler's Gestalt, and proposes an un-Jungian kind of archetype. The overall rationale of the system, that proposes, ultimately, to explain mythic thinking, the principle, it might be said, that holds all this together, is derived from Saussurean structural linguistics. It not only provides, but adds to, structuralism's universalist aura. Undoubtedly the "descent" of structuralism from structural linguistics, which itself transcends the usual departmentalization of knowledge, appealed to those ideologists who were concerned about the overspecialization and the increasing fragmentation of thought. The theory's original acclaim came from those "global" minds who wanted, once again, to reunify our intellectual universe, and who hoped that structuralism might provide a plausible and inclusive ideology which could explain all of the current social and individual malaise, and which could, finally, answer the basic questions about the origins of humanity and of culture.

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The last volume of *Mythologiques, L'Homme Nu*, just like all the previous ones, promises the answer to this puzzle. Essentially, Levi-Strauss holds our attention because he maintains, all along, that the analysis of more and more myths in relation to their cultures, and the elaborations of the particular functions of these myths, would "show" how the universality of nature's contrasts, beauties, and moods parallels the universality of culture and of myth, and would ultimately uncover universal structures. Levi-Strauss uses musical themes and variations to persuade and entrance; and his fascinating mythological symphonies frequently obfuscate the fact that the unconscious structures still remain hidden. And all the examples of oppositions and of transformations of the raw and the cooked, of fire and ashes, of honey and table manners in the structural analysis of myth, only pretend to explain how the author chose the ingredients (myths) of his structuralist "stew." Although he carefully justifies and explains his selections with analogies and diagrams, it is somewhat difficult to agree, for instance, that because in two Bororo myths the advent of culture is dependent upon the massacre of a community, the transition from "nature" to "culture" always corresponds, in native thought, to the transition from the "continuous" to the "discontinuous." Or, that proof of such oppositions in all of his 813 myths will confirm structuralism as a "science." In any event, the claim to science will remain a myth until these elusive—and so far unconscious—structures have been uncovered, or brought to the surface. And because Levi-Strauss keeps assuring us that all reality is based on these structures, all true "believers" in structuralism continue to search for them: they're the optimists who hope that this mythological map might eventually provide not just a coordination of knowledge but nothing less than a new explication of the universe.

But faith, be it in the powers of Weber's charismatic leader, in Marx's revolution, in Freud's unconscious, in Comte's positivist religion, or in Parson's system, has led to the downfall as well as the acceptance of all "scientific Grand Theories." It seems that the more grandiose the theory the more faith it demands; and ironically, its claims are most strongly challenged by competing thinkers who have their own big theories to sell. In such an ideological contest, structuralism with its "hidden" and "undiscovered" components is particularly vulnerable to criticism and therefore more easily discredited.

What then are the major disagreements with structuralism, if it can be thought of as a sort of "systems theory"? And to what extent, we must ask, does structuralism serve as a new territory for academic and intellectual busywork? Is it more valid in some areas than in others? And if so, how do the isolated structuralist "disciplines" hold up, even if the Grand Theory has crumbled? These are only some of the questions to which we haven't had the answers.

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Originally, structuralism, not only in anthropology, but in linguistics and subsequently in other areas, was for French intellectuals what structural-functionalism (Parson's Worldview which subsumes and orders all social facts into social systems, personality systems, and their value-orientations) was for their American counterparts: a system which inspired a flurry of academic activity, created controversies and factions, and which, in the process, made academic reputations for its exponents, opponents, and commentators. And just as structural-functionalism could only have been made up by an American, so structuralism could only have been thought up by a Frenchman. Both of these Grand Theories are typical expressions of their own cultures: the French theory claiming underlying rationality and science for a philosophical flight of imagination, and the American one killing off imagination for a display of science and rationality. Levi-Strauss might, of course, find some underlying unity in these opposing approaches, another instance, as it were, of the undisclosed structures. But I prefer, for the moment, to look at the surface—at the cultural, intellectual, and political implications of the two "systems."

Both Parsons and Levi-Strauss travelled abroad and brought back the major components of their theories before working on them at home. Parsons, while studying in Europe, "found" a convergence between the concepts of Pareto, Weber, Durkheim, and Marshall (he later replaced Marshall by Freud); Levi-Strauss discovered his universal components of myth on his anthropological explorations in South America. Both of them are convinced that the social sciences can be as rigorous as the natural sciences, though both are against any kind of positivism. But like Comte, both are so carried away by their method that their substance is reduced to a constant restatement of itself. Their findings become a function of their system, when, as Levi-Strauss says, one stresses "those aspects of a subject which coincide with the properties of[one's] own thought." But Parsons's empiricism, with its detailed charts of personal and group behavior, involves dealing with observable data and appears scientific—if only at first glance. Levi-Strauss's empiricism, on the other hand, consists largely of the discovery of oppositions and of universal rules in kinship structures. And although his assumption of similar oppositions and rules in myths is systematically argued, it is nothing but an assumption so long as the universal structures have not yet emerged to "prove" the uniformity of all cultures. This emergence is still awaited, and we still have no clue to the form it will take.

Levi-Strauss, to uncover these universals, zeros in on the "systematic application of rules of oppositions such as high and low, heaven and earth, land and water, near and far, left and right, male and female, in myths—to uncover the deepest structures of thought and by implication their connec-

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tions to the structures of language, social systems and cultures." Clearly, such oppositions are everywhere. And since they are assumed to go back to the beginning of culture and to be connected with the evolution of thought and of language, Levi-Strauss makes sense when he states that the origins of myth are confused with the origins of thought itself. But he gets onto slippery ground when a dialectic of oppositions, including those of myth and of thought, is postulated as structuralism's methodology, and when the idea of a "systematic" opposition becomes a "scientific" enterprise.

Methodologies are always easy targets. But attacks on structuralism's methodology are child's play because the method itself can't be validated, and is at times actually part of the theory. We can already see this in the first volume, *The Raw and the Cooked*, in the systematic dissection of the Bororo reference myth. This myth describes the bloody adventures of an incestuous hero who steals birds' nests, and is, at the same time, part of a group of 187 myths explaining the origin of cooking, the connection of cooking to thought, to neighboring tribes, and to the universe; and the very process of dissection itself becomes part of the substance of the theory—if we are to go along with Levi-Strauss. When, for example, he explains the jaguar's closed jaws in Myth no. 7 by its reverse, the wide-open jaws in Myth no. 55, or when he contrasts the helpfulness of the vultures in Myth no. 1 to their "pretended" helpfulness in Myth no. 55, the material itself is so engrossing one tends to forget it is being used to illustrate a new scientific social theory. To complicate further the relation of method to theory, Levi-Strauss cautions that analysis of myth goes beyond the analysis of its terminology, of content and of form, and focuses on the relations which unite all of these things. The relations, then, are the ultimate objects of structural analysis. Thus the myths must be interpreted before we can reach the relations or the structures. And this unraveling takes us through complex transformations and turbulent mythological processes. We are constantly reminded by Levi-Strauss that the structures will surface through the analysis of the many tales in the way unconscious thought emerges into consciousness through psychoanalysis. Hence, the unveiling of the structures becomes a kind of cultural psychoanalysis. And at the same time, the moves from totalization to detotalization, from past to present, from irreversible to reversible time, promise with this method, ultimately, to transform fairy tale into "science." Meanwhile, as more and more myths are interrelated to explain each other, as well as their societies and their mores, our fascination keeps increasing—but not enough to overcome our skepticism.

Naturally, just as the larger scope of Einsteinian physics replaced Newton, so structuralism would, automatically, replace anthropological theories based on functionalism, which emphasize usefulness as the main evolutionary factor. Since "evolutionary" anthropology cannot readily

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accomodate the existence and immutability of underlying structures, Levi-Strauss, of course, discredits it. He acknowledges its existence, though, as part of culture and therefore as yet another item for structural analysis. In his capacity of anthropologist he suggests that functionalists abandon studying tribes and villages as enclosed systems, and instead of, for example, studying the Trobrianders or the inhabitants of a mountain hamlet in terms of practical geographical limits and their intrinsic properties, begin to look at such "cross-cultural interactions" as migrations, revolutions, wars and their lasting consequences. These criticisms were, of course, primarily directed at Malinowski's "descendants," but they also apply to Parsons's structural-functionalism.

We are all familiar with the irrational components of Parsons's rational, "American" sociology, based on seemingly objective dichotomies like particularism vs. universalism, affectivity vs. affective neutrality, with its concerns with systems and boundary-maintenance, its assumptions of the goal-directedness of all human action, etc. But we are more at home with this native variety of irrationality than with the strange French (philosophical and mythological) import. Yet in some ways Levi-Strauss and Parsons are not so far apart, for both lean heavily on Durkheim, and we would expect some "convergence," and agreement in, at least their interpretations of him. But they derive from different aspects of Durkheim's theory. Parsons basically incorporates the idea of "organic" solidarity, and his individuals depend only on specific groups in their society, on certain functions and relations which indirectly bind them to humanity as a whole. The solidarity of Levi-Strauss's natives is still basically tribal, that is to say "mechanical," and thus automatically binds the individual directly to his entire society with its more or less organized totality of beliefs and sentiments. The myths of Levi-Strauss's natives emanate from their total reality which is *sui generis*: their conscious or unconscious thoughts and actions stem from their tribal lives, their religion, and their ways of dealing with the elements, with neighboring tribes and with survival. These are then the "collective representations" and are social facts of the same order as are their habits of hunting and gathering, their rites of cooking and of religion. And to Levi-Strauss, rituals that are to bring rain, fertility, or other desired goods, and which we dismiss as irrational and/or magical thinking, become—within their own context—the rational manifestations of the natives' unconscious lives and of their universe. The key to their meaning, however, is provided by Levi-Strauss.

This, I must say, is the appealing side of structuralism. There is no denying that as our skepticism of the theory grows, we also become more receptive to the idea that there might be "deep" structures linking all of humanity, everywhere, because such a theory would add weight to the cher-

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ished principle of human equality. Obviously, structuralism would satisfy the contemporary need to do away with the contradictory explanations of the disturbing differences between "savage" and "civilized" societies. Structuralism thus would find the common human denominator in the inequities of race, class, wealth, and state of social advance. Many of the French neo-structuralists, for example, write as though structuralism were an extension of Marxist libertarian ideas, as though structuralism were a Maoist faction. And the fact is that in America, some of the simplified and popularized versions, or misinterpretations, of structuralism are thought to bolster democracy and egalitarianism more effectively than Constitutional guarantees because social injustices would represent temporal, or superficial, forms of unchanging and timeless essences. In the light of structuralism, invidious racial theories, like those of Herrnstein or Jensen, would be seen as the politicalization of appearances, instead of realities.

Unfortunately, though, structuralist ideas—either in Levi-Strauss's original context or in its "deviant" forms—have no immediate political implications; structuralist theories, in spite of Marxist pronouncements, cannot really be applied to wipe out racism or other inequalities. For the assumption of underlying "structural" inequality, like most theories that postulate human and social constants, inevitably excludes politics as a means of social advance. Essentially Levi-Strauss doesn't deal with political conditions because, for him, human behavior is preordained by unconscious forces beyond individual control. The issue of human equality is symbolically solved before it is ever raised; and structuralism's most radical components are also its most conservative elements, insofar as the assumption of unconscious—and unchanging—cultural structures, which puts them beyond the reach of politics, makes for conservatism. Hence this fusion of radical thought with political conservatism appeals to those American liberals whose visions of justice entail a minimum of social change, and who find no great difficulty in reconciling inequality with equality and war with peace.

II.

Structuralists' disagreements with Marxism focus on politics and on Levi-Strauss's interpretation of the meaning of history. In spite of attacks on him by Marxists like Lefebvre and Sartre, Levi-Strauss manages to think of himself as a Marxist; he insists that he's been one since he was seventeen. His special brand of Marxism is "attached to fundamental notions of exchange and production, and to production of culture out of nature." But his specific application of the dialectic ignores some of Marx's central concepts, such as

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economic and historical determinism, increasing polarization, and revolution. (Sartre, and Lefebvre, of course, also have their own versions of Marxism.)

Like Marx, Levi-Strauss assumes that economic production arises from human needs, though he often stands Marx on his "side" when, by implication, he perceives exchange of goods as well as thoughts, persons, and culture as the superstructure. But he does defend his own reading of Marx when he insists that "dialectic materialism should always be able to proceed by transformation, from economic or social structure to the structure of law, art, or religion . . . [and that] these transformations were dialectic, and [that] in some cases Marx went to great lengths to discover the crucial transformations which at first sight seemed to defy analysis." And though, like Marx, his "dialectic springs directly from the customs and the philosophy of the group, from whom the individual learns his lesson . . . and [from] his belief in guardian spirits," and from the fact that "society as a whole teaches its members that their only hope of salvation within the established social order lies in an absurd and despairing attempt to get free from that order," he cannot draw Marx's conclusions about an impending revolution. Of course, part of Levi-Strauss's problem is the difficulty of applying Marxism to primitive cultures. Besides, his rather Durkheimian vision of personal freedom sidesteps, or ignores, such basic concepts of Marx's as false consciousness as well as revolution. These omissions leave his "Marxism" open to attack by "Marxists."

And one of his most vociferous critics is Sartre—the "real" Marxist. Actually their battle revolves around a much larger issue: the intellectual leadership of France, where esoteric and marginal thinkers can become charismatic leaders of a wide range of intellectuals. So, surely, Levi-Strauss's ascent to the position of number one thinker is not impeded when he dismisses phenomenology and existentialism as novel ways of justifying metaphysics and insists that his own method is the only truly scientific one. He is the first anthropologist who dared challenge the philosopher's intellectual supremacy, but, then, he also had the advantage of a philosophic training which permits him to cope with Sartre in his own terms. By now, the intellectual mudslinging, which reached its peak in Sartre's *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* and in *The Savage Mind*, has become a global polemic.

But aside from the rhetoric of the argument, the basic difference between Levi-Strauss and Sartre is on the question of history. Essentially, Levi-Strauss interprets the oral traditions of primitive societies in an ahistorical fashion. His is a history of the moment that is forever reconstituted in his forever veiled structures; history is brought up to date each time a myth is retold, and in each human mind. And the history of a society instead of being

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a special subject of study, an "objective" rational tale or something that is tied to a specific era, becomes a part of its current existence. This makes everything seem preordained—and arbitrary; and every interpretation becomes as valid as another, because there is no accounting for change or evolution. Leach, the English anthropologist, explains it well when he compares Levi-Strauss's "human brain" to a very complicated computer that sorts out information according to an "adjustable program": unlike Kant's *a priori* principles, which are philosophical, Levi-Strauss's system works like a computer because its built-in structures impose order upon all social variables. But again, it is unconscious order, which until its final unveiling appears—to me, at least—as a kind of planned disorder.

Sartre doesn't recognize any such order—or the "destiny" it implies. For Sartre, says Verstraeten in *Temps Modernes*, "the world is outside; [and for him] neither language nor culture are in the individual, like a 'brand' registered by the nervous system, but the individual is in his culture and in his language, which means in a special sector of *instruments*. To manifest what it [history] unveils, it disposes of elements which are at the same time too rich and too numerable." And "for Sartre consciousness of self and of things," says the French philosopher Pouillon, "is discovered by itself in praxis, and is, for this reason, no more than an apprehension of reality." That means, of course, outer reality, not inner structure. For Sartre, liberty and necessity are one and are achieved by people through their free actions—through their *engagement*. But Levi-Strauss's natives are bound: their actions emanate from the same structures that explain kinship patterns, social life, and language. Sartre's dialectic is between men and their surroundings; and processes of interiorization and exteriorization of these surroundings are tied to their very existence. This closely approximates Marx's view that economic circumstances determine people's ideas and beliefs. But Levi-Strauss's dialectic is between men as social beings and their unconscious thoughts, which, in turn, derive from the undiscovered structures. Clearly, existentialist "shallowness" opposes structuralist "depth."

Inevitably both positions have their proseletyzers and followers, and both are argued in characteristically French fashion, though in different modes of abstraction. Both represent abstract visions—or theoretical models—and are nonpragmatic. And all translations into American idioms—popularized or academic—are bound to result in genuine misunderstanding and/or distorted applications of structuralism and of existentialism.

III.

Levi-Strauss's reading of Freud is also different from ours. He clearly—and explicitly—bases his conscious and unconscious structures on Freudian

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concepts of psychoanalysis. But his Freud, as expected, is derived from *Totem and Taboo*, and from the sense of guilt that originated in the killing of the primal father, along with the subsequent remorse and ambivalence suffered by the sons. In this way, the universal structural elements of the Oedipus complex—with all of their alterations—also would be transmitted through successive generations by all of the myths related to it. And the Oedipus complex itself becomes one of the main pillars of the structures. Actually, this particular—and apparently universal—myth, which as we know has acquired a special importance in Freudian theory, does look like one of Levi-Strauss's universal structures. In fact, at the beginning, it was cited by Leach to give at least partial credence to the argument for structuralism. By implication then, it might almost be said that the discovery of the structures is tantamount to the discovery of the father, though to Freud this primal figure seemed to be much more of a speculative, psychological construction.

From the beginning Levi-Strauss took over Freud's idea of defense mechanisms such as repression, reaction formation, substitution, and blocking in order to explain his "transformations" from logical to irrational and from conscious to unconscious thought. But where Freud asked his patients to free associate in order to remember traumatic events, Levi-Strauss's natives, in their myths, retell the traumatic memories of the tribe. They talk, for instance, of the boy who fell in love with his sister, who finally took refuge in the sky and became the sun after she had become the moon in order to escape him; thus he can pursue her, but—alas—can catch her only briefly during an eclipse. Or they speak of men who, long ago, changed into birds and who are still responsible for rain. Obviously the natives' myths resemble our dreams: "they reduce one type of reality to another [because] true reality is never the most obvious one, . . . [and] takes care to evade our detection." Levi-Strauss calls this a sort of superrationalism which assimilates sense perceptions to reasoning and which, nevertheless, "retains all of the elements and properties of the original thought."

Where Freud used symbolism and symbolic systems to analyze a person's dreams and his associations to them, Levi-Strauss takes in the whole culture; where the Freudian aim is to reconstruct individual history, the structuralist "ambition" is to reconstruct cultural history; and where Freud's basic analytic units range from single words to complex meanings, Levi-Strauss's basic (or constituent) units are the "shortest sentences." Levi-Strauss loosely refers to the "two traumas"—one of Freud's more fleeting thoughts—of everyone's personal neurotic myth and of the universal and religious one, and puts it to structural use: thus the above-mentioned myth about the transformation of the girl into the moon and the boy into the sun would "show" the dialectic process of transformation between the two in relation to the persistence of the

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incest taboo. At the same time it indicates the "interchangeability" between man and nature, "proving" once more that there are many levels to both individual and cultural madness. Therefore, he concludes, neither one can exist without the other.

But how does all this "scientifically" demonstrate the validity of structuralism, as Levi-Strauss suggested when he introduced his mathematical formula in *The Structural Study of Myth?* It is easy, says Levi-Strauss, if only we manage to "get a team and technical help," in order to catalogue and subdivide every version of every myth into constituent units, examine all of their relations to each other and to "reversible" and "irreversible" time, and then read the mysterious combinations as a conductor would read a complicated orchestra score. This running overflow of data would, of course, have to be handled by a computer. Thus about fifteen years ago Levi-Strauss inspired some French psychologists and psychoanalysts to begin computerization of constituent units, and of analysands' dreams. But this enterprise seems to have fizzled out. Had it worked, and had the "expected" structures emerged, Levi-Strauss's insistence that structuralism is a science would have been irrefutably proven. The use of technology would, itself, have conferred scientific credentials on it. (Simultaneously, psychoanalysis would have been elevated to the "scientific" status of psychology or sociology.)

In the meantime, a favorite disciple of Levi-Strauss's, Lacan, demonstrated that it is possible to be a structuralist without being scientific. Lacan, to whom *Yale French Studies* devoted an entire volume in 1972, developed his own structural psychoanalysis, an abstract and complicated Hegelian dialectic that operates within a Saussurean framework and focuses on Freud's ego psychology. His "reading of Freud is that Freud's discovery of repression was itself necessarily and constantly being repressed." Thus, says the philosopher Palmier, Lacan's neurotic patients are modern men of the Hegelian unhappy conscience, who realize themselves through others, in this case through the mediation of the analyst's words. Essentially Lacan perceives the structural psychoanalyst as the analysand's link to his culture; and analytic interpretations are de-alienating mechanisms which turn the person from an individual in himself to one for himself. In any case, the roots of Lacan's thought are very similar to Levi-Strauss's (i.e., his unconscious is structured like a language, and the child's identity is formed through three successive mirror-stages leading to individuation). But Lacan is more concerned with Freud's prose, with the reading of his works, than Levi-Strauss, who incorporates Freud's free association, the unconscious, and some of his social theories. And because his application of Freud is so different, Lacan escapes criticism in Levi-Strauss's summary comments.

Not many of Levi-Strauss's "deviant" interpretors are that lucky. In the

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last chapter of *L'Homme Nu* he attacks literary structuralists like Derrida or Barthes, who themselves have altered their own "structuralisms," although he does not refer to them by name. Nor does he name all the other "deviants" whom he dismisses out of hand, essentially because they apply structural techniques without Levi-Strauss's "real" structures. True structuralist theory, he says, does not extrapolate from linguistic distinctions between syntagmatic and paradigmatic aspects of verbal communication, does not perceive narrative literature as transformation by enlargement of the basic sentence structure, and does not define characters as nouns, their situations or attributes as adjectives, and their actions as verbs. Because their structuralism is not linked to real phenomena, he calls these "deviants" the fiction structuralists of the philosophical literary world, who talk only to each other; and he lumps them with the existentialists who ignore science, yet discuss it—regularly—at the Café Commerce (Sartre's hangout). Clearly, he has no use for this "applied literary structuralism" which is "about as related to linguistics and to ethnography as popular entertainment is to physics or biology: both of them are sentimental pastimes which feed on badly-digested summary knowledge." They both exist only to relieve boredom. Hence he knocks literary structuralism, which is content with a "literal" application of structural techniques, as a perversion of real structuralism, whose intent would be to find out why some literary works continue to survive and why only some continue to captivate us.

Inevitably such criticism is ignored in the English departments of those American universities where literary structuralism is in vogue, since it provides a new theory for English teachers bored with the old approaches. And not the least of its attractions is that it is both pragmatic and ideological. For while structuralism's pseudoscientism satisfies the bent for empirical investigation, its claim to have discovered the essence of all artistic activities also promises to provide a method for solving—or bypassing—the form-content dilemma that in one way or another has plagued modern criticism. In this respect, structuralism seems to have answered some of the objections to "myth" criticism by adding an appearance of rigor to the search for common themes. But, of course, structuralism still could be charged with the lack of historicity—a charge that has been leveled frequently at myth criticism.

Levi-Strauss's criticisms and comments have, to some extent, had their effect on the literary structuralists, themselves descendants of Saussure as well as Jacobson and Troubetskoy, who see current phonology "as part of a broader scientific movement." Along with Genette, they believe that "the end of criticism is to arrive at our intimate knowledge of critical reality," when "critical thought becomes the thought criticized . . . [through] re-feeling, re-thinking, re-imagining the thought from the inside." But literary structuralism's "intersubjective criticism" leaves out customary "intellectual

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operations'' and, instead, recovers ''a message at once old and totally renewed.'' This focus on a particular work is, of course, contrary to Levi-Strauss's emphasis on the linking of all myths. And because variations of literary structuralism are now fashionable at some American universities, those academics who opposed it only because they did not understand French and/or the French philosophical manner will have the word of the master himself that it is a useless academic exercise when *L'Homme Nu* appears in translation.

But literary structuralism is not the only ''naive'' empiricism that Levi-Strauss decries. He talks of all of the arts, of painting and of music as being contaminated by empirical studies which put in meanings and implications that are not there. He reiterates again and again that the true structures exist, even if we have not yet found them, and that they do not lend themselves to the kinds of ''artificial constructs'' some academicians insist on. These people, he says, are engaged in a sort of ''manufacture of works of art,'' which are neither art nor science but a different—and fraudulent—enterprise, as is computerized music, which he also puts into this category of non-sense, because ''a computer cannot compose real music, but ought, instead, to be used to find out, for example, how and why after hearing two or three measures, we know who wrote a particular work, and/or what it is.'' So much for the structuralist epigones who substitute false interpretations for true structures.

IV.

In the final paragraphs of *L'Homme Nu*, after Levi-Strauss has disposed of all the ''pseudo-structuralists,'' he ends up by reaffirming his belief in his own theory, and again suggests that we apply ''real'' structural techniques to all of culture. He proposes what might be called a ''super-structuralist'' work-hypothesis for structuralism itself which locates the four ''major families''—mathematics, natural languages (these subsume the sciences), musical works, and myths—on opposite poles of two intersecting axes. And he applies all of the structuralist methodology in what first appears to be a systematic procedure but soon turns out to be a fancy footwork of transpositions, transformations, and oppositions along and between the ''scientific'' axis (mathematics and language) and the ''sensual'' one (music and myths), in order to convince us that structuralism makes sense. But when, for the sake of his argument and for symmetry, he states that ''myth had to die for its form to depart like the soul leaving the body, in order to demand from music a means of reincarnation,'' or when he talks of the meetings of molecules of sound or image and those of sense as ''a sort of copulation,'' then it is clear

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that he has soared off into metaphysics—or bad poetry. Apparently, he has returned to philosophy. But now his poetic philosophy is laced with scientific references, and his oppositions, his axes and four-cornered analyses are oddly reminiscent of the Parsonian framework. He has rejected all "mini-structuralisms" for a "macro-structuralism."

It seems that this larger framework has facilitated the acceptance of structuralism as one of the "scientific" philosophies of our century. Yet Levi-Strauss does not seem to be aware that his questions are more "scientific" than his answers. For he sidesteps the whole question of science and myth when he talks about the ultimate and fundamental opposition of structuralism as represented in Hamlet's dilemma, which is at the bottom of everything. He says that Hamlet has no choice between being and nonbeing: he is eternally caught and forced to swing between ever-new contradictions until he dies. Thus life and death, Levi-Strauss concludes, are both the fundamental and the ultimate opposition of structuralism. This is, of course, pure metaphysics, and as the metaphysical premises of structuralism are made more visible, its scientific pretensions appear more blatant. In fact, his Messianic structuralist message which appeals to the reader's belief in the structures appears to carry religious overtones. Clearly, Levi-Strauss has come a long way from his original "structural anthropology," from the structure of kinship to the hidden connections between nature and culture, from tribal studies to a unified worldview. Perhaps that is why after about seventeen years, Levi-Strauss has returned to the study of kinship structures. Or perhaps he continues to believe that more anthropological data might bring new "converts" to structuralism, although that would scarcely strengthen its larger theoretical claims.

Still, even if, as I have been arguing, structuralism itself is a new mythology and is not, as a rule, convincing, I do not mean to deny Levi-Strauss's genius and his intellectual versatility. Though structuralism's complex musical dialectic relies upon a magic wand, its failure as an all-inclusive theory should not obscure its influence on other fields. Nor should this failure diminish Levi-Strauss's stature or question his place in intellectual history.

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David Thorburn

FICTION AND IMAGINATION IN DON QUIXOTE

> Don Quixote will make it imperative for him [the poet] to make a choice, to come to a decision regarding the imagination and reality; and he will find that it is not a choice of one over the other and not a decision that divides them, but something subtler, a recognition that here, too, . . . the universal interdependence exists, and hence his choice and his decision must be that they are equal and inseparable.
>
> Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words."

All the classic commentaries on the *Quixote* acknowledge the centrality of the theme of imagination, and several of them penetrate quite deeply into the subject, calling our attention (for example) to the way in which Cervantes anticipates modern writers like Gide and Pirandello, both of whom are profoundly interested in the problem of art's connection to and distance from life and both of whom write books and plays about the making of books and plays. The best essays on Cervantes's novel are conscious of the way in which Quixote's encounters with the world enact a drama in which the real and the ideal (or the fictive) collide, and they are fully aware of the extent to which the book comes finally to celebrate the Quixotic enterprise even as it mocks it. But despite this widespread recognition of the importance of the theme of imagination in the *Quixote*, there remains, I think, a good deal to be said about the subject, both as it concerns Cervantes's characters and the structure of his novel, and also as it affects our understanding of what the novel as a literary kind is: what the novel by its very nature must always potentially be.

I begin with this second point, with the way in which Cervantes's book prepares for the birth of the novel and clarifies the very premises on which the novel as a genre will depend, the *Quixote's* intense, encompassing self-reflexiveness qualifying conventional definitions of the genre's realistic bias

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and calling into question the even more prevalent assumption that the self-absorption of so much twentieth-century fiction is a characteristically modern development. In one sense, my argument is an attempt to elaborate and to validate Lionel Trilling's suggestive remarks concerning the *Quixote* in "Manners, Morals and the Novel."

> In any genre it may happen that the first great example contains the whole potentiality of the genre. It has been said that all philosophy is a footnote to Plato. It can be said that all prose fiction is a variation on the theme of *Don Quixote*. Cervantes sets for the novel the problem of appearance and reality: the shifting and conflict of social classes become the field of the problem of knowledge, of how we know and of how reliable our knowledge is . . . .

Trilling goes on to describe the novel's generic intimacy with questions of money and of social class, leaving implicit the epistemological theme I wish to pursue. But he has at least intimated what I want to examine directly, and his claim for the *Quixote*'s decisive inclusiveness seems as true of the book's preoccupation with its own nature as of its focus on manners and morals.

That preoccupation is distilled for us, and in particularly resonant ways, in the third chapter of Part II, which opens with Quixote waiting uneasily for Sancho and the Bachelor Carrasco, who is to report on the mysterious publication of Part I of the novel. This volume has appeared as if "by magic art," and much to Quixote's discomfort, even while

> the blood of the enemies he had slain was scarcely dry on his own sword-blade. . . .[I]f it were true that there was such a history, since it was about a knight errant it must perforce be grandiloquent, lofty, remarkable, magnificent and true. With this he was somewhat consoled; but it disturbed him to think that its author was a Moor, as that name of Cide suggested. For he could hope for no truth of the Moors, since they are all cheats, forgers, and schemers. He was afraid too that his love affairs might have been treated with indelicacy . . . . (J.M. Cohen Translation; Penguin Books, 1954.)

The complex unease suggested here—Quixote's doubts about his chivalric enterprise encouraging the defensive suspicion that Moors are untrustworthy—continues through the whole chapter, and contrasts sharply with Sancho's confident, even aggressive loquaciousness. Sancho's interruptions during the conversation between Carrasco and Quixote repeatedly direct attention toward those elements of their past adventures that are least Quixotic and most congruent with the pragmatic earthiness of Sancho's sense of the world.

Sancho begins this comic drama of self-assertion and self-definition

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almost immediately. As Carrasco begins to answer Quixote's first tentative question concerning the reputation given him by his chronicler, Sancho breaks in to object that "my lady Dulcinea" was never called Doña: "There the history's wrong," he says. Carrasco and Quixote impatiently agree that this objection is trivial, and try to continue their discourse. But Sancho thrusts himself forward again after but one paragraph, and this time succeeds in holding the initiative:

> "Tell me, Master Bachelor," put in Sancho, "does the adventure with the Yanguesans come in, when our good Rocinante had a fancy to look for dainties at the bottom of the sea?"
>
> "The sage left nothing in his ink-horn," replied Sampson. "He tells us everything, . . . even to the capers Sancho cut on the blanket."
>
> "I cut no capers on the blanket," replied Sancho. "But in the air I did, and more than I liked."

Sancho's interruptions culminate at the end of the chapter in his abrupt departure. This leave-taking frustrates Carrasco's inquiries concerning certain details of Part I, and Sancho's motives are characteristic and significant:

> "I'm not prepared now, Master Sampson," replied Sancho, "to go into details or accounts, for I've got a stomach-ache [literally: I feel faint in the stomach], and if I don't cure it with two gulps of the old stuff, it will put me on St. Lucy's thorn [i.e., it will make me suffer hungerpains]. I have a drop at home, and my old woman is waiting for me. I'll come back when I've had my dinner, and answer all your worship's questions, and all the world's besides . . . "

Thus do literary and philosophical speculations yield to earthier claims; Sancho leaves, "waiting no reply," and the discussion of Cide Hamete's story is resumed, in the subsequent chapter, only when Sancho returns. The form of the chapter, then, is controlled not by the learned Bachelor, who has come to answer questions but ends by asking them; and not by Quixote, who waits passively in the beginning and yields the stage to his squire through most of the episode; but by Sancho, who will not officially achieve the office Quixote has promised him for many pages but is already in governance over the characters in the story and over its very structure.

Sancho's progress in this chapter from the periphery to the center of the discussion dramatizes in small compass the larger pattern or action of the *Quixote* as a whole. And this enactment in miniature of Sancho's ascension mirrors not only the larger careers of the two central characters but also, of course, the book's largest subject, which is the contention between the Quixotic vision and a recalcitrant empirical reality, whose ultimate domina-

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tion is prefigured in the outcome of nearly every one of Quixote's adventures and is realized in Quixote's final "sanity" and death.

These matters are made explicit in the exchange, from which I quoted earlier, concerning Cide Hamete's inclusiveness as a historian. Quixote is less than pleased to learn that even Sancho's capers on the blanket are a part of the record:

> "In my opinion," said Don Quixote, "there is no human history in the world which has not got its ups and downs, particularly those that treat of knight errantry. They can never be full of fortunate incidents."
>
> "For all that," replied the Bachelor, "some who have read your history say that they would have been glad if the authors had left out a few of the countless beatings which Don Quixote received in various encounters."
>
> "That's where the truth of the story comes in," said Sancho.

A materialist who knows that the flesh must remember its pain, Sancho is here implicitly defining the empirical commitment of Cervantes's book and of the literary genre it originates. The physically, the experientially real, Sancho says, my encounters with the solid objects in the phenomenal world—that is where the truth comes in.

Quixote doesn't quite dispute this view; his respect for the flesh is very great and has been widely underestimated. But he does suggest that "fairness" might have led his chronicler to minimize the beatings. Even Aeneas, he suggests, was not so pious as Virgil paints him. Carrasco now offers a crucial distinction whose presence, in this context especially, indicates how clear and explicit is Cervantes's own sense of his book's originality.

> "That is true," replied Sampson; "but it is one thing to write as a poet, and another as a historian. The poet can relate and sing things, not as they were but as they should have been, without in any way affecting the truth of the matter."

The historian's commitment, which is the novelist's, Carrasco insists, is to things as they are. Unlike Cervantes himself, Carrasco may be rather too confident that things as they are can be objectively perceived and then translated into words; but he is scarcely alone in his confidence, for the prevailing understanding of the novel as a genre proceeds from some conception of its "realism."

"Realism" is a slippery term, of course, and one might wish to substitute Ian Watt's term, "formal realism," which is intended to describe the primary narrative methods or procedures of the novel. Watt remains, I think, the most lucid and intelligent theorist of the novel, and his basic definitions have

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been widely accepted. As he writes in *The Rise of the Novel:*

> The narrative method whereby the novel embodies this circumstantial view of life may be called its formal realism; formal because the term realism does not here refer to any literary doctrine or purpose, but only to a set of narrative procedures which are so commonly found together in the novel, and so rarely in other literary genres, that they may be regarded as typical of the form itself. Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise that Defoe and Richardson accepted very literally, but which is implicit in the novel form in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms.
>
> . . . There are important differences in the degree to which different literary forms imitate reality; and the formal realism of the novel allows a more immediate imitation of individual experience set in its temporal and spatial environment than do other literary forms.

What is new, *novel,* about the novel, then, as both Watt's definition and Cervantes's book make clear, is its special fidelity to the discrete particularness, the circumstantiality, of the world. Cervantes's ambiguous contempt for the romances of chivalry is grounded in part in his powerful sense that they leave out too much, are, in a sense, unreal. Like the priest in the *Quixote*, Cervantes is, *partly*, a literalist, and he shares the priest's distaste for fictions which ignore or cannot acknowledge the press and smell and pain of quotidian experience.

But to speak solely in these terms, to locate (as Watt and Carrasco do) what is essential to the novel exclusively in this commitment to a "circumstantial view of life," is to ignore a paradox that exposes the limitations of the idea that the novel is more "realistic," closer to life, and thus less "artificial" than other literary genres. I think something of this simplified understanding is implicit in Watt's remark about the novel's reliance on a more largely referential language than is common to other genres, and in his notion that Fielding, so much more directly the heir of Cervantes, is less a novelist than Richardson or Defoe because the circumstantiality of his books is qualified by a self-aware authorial voice and by an abstract, generalizing style. That we are in thrall to some such view of the novel is clear from the attitude of a great many scholars and readers toward books like *Tristram Shandy* or Gide's *The Counterfeiters* or (even) *Ulysses*. These works, and others like them, seem to be regarded as remarkable aberrations or at least departures, richly interesting to be sure, but still deviant books, whose powerful, explicit self-consciousness

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places them in a special class, a sort of sub-genre, which some have even called "the anti-novel." Many contemporary fiction writers—Nabokov, Borges and Beckett especially, but many others as well—are commonly praised in such terms, and on the mistaken ground that their interest in the theme of art is radically innovative, a distinctive characteristic, in fact, of modern literature.

The limitations of such a view of the novel are exposed richly and fully in Cervantes's book, and especially in the episode from Part II we have been examining. For whatever Carrasco himself may think, the very discussion he is carrying on with Sancho and Don Quixote concerning the reliability of the Moorish historian who has written Part I calls attention unmistakably to the fact that the question of authority or authenticity is acutely baffling; indeed, that a commitment to empirical as opposed to "poetic" truthfulness actually *creates* rather than disposes of epistemological perplexity. For to lay claim to truths that are assumed to inhere in a reality that can be verified on our pulses, and to commit oneself to a largely referential language (as novelists and Carrasco's historians in part surely do), is to be vulnerable as never before to a nominalist perception of the unbridgeable distance between objects and words, between experience and the language we contrive to describe and encompass it. As the *Quixote* shows preeminently, the novel's very commitment to a new particularizing and concretizing realism is at the same time a potential commitment to an unremitting self-absorption, an acute self-consciousness concerning the authority of its own statements and the very nature of language and the ordering faculties of the mind. Such epistemological difficulties are latent, of course, in all literary works, indeed in all verbal expression, as the structuralists especially have been insisting in recent years. But my point is, what is latent in the nature of language and in other literary kinds is explicit in the novel, whose defining empiricism makes some kind of self-searching nominalism inescapable. There are no maps of Arcadia, but many of us are Spaniards or have been to Spain.

This, and other related conclusions are forced upon us by the *Quixote*'s encompassing self-consciousness, and especially by its tactic of filtering the story through various narrators. The reader, Cervantes delights in reminding us, is given the story by a Spanish narrator, who has employed a scribe to translate from the original Arabic a history composed by Cide Hamete Benengeli, a Moor whose fairness concerning his Christian protagonist that hero himself calls into question. And there are still other sources of error and distortion, as Sancho reveals in chapter four of Part II when Carrasco inquires into an apparent inconsistency in the history.

> "I don't know how to answer that," said Sancho. "All I can say is that perhaps the history-writer was wrong, or it may have been an error of the printer's."

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This characteristic moment is, of course, a disconcertingly bold way of reminding us that the book we are reading is a physical object, a commodity produced and perhaps altered by technicians who know nothing of Dulcinea and probably do not care to know. It is appropriate, even deeply significant (as Robert Alter has pointed out) that Quixote actually visits a printing plant late in Part II, where he studies the physical processes by which books are made and where he discourses on the difficulties of translation, finally seeing a proofreader at work on the spurious second part of the *Quixote* itself.

This insistence on the limits of the book we hold in our hands, and especially the recurring tactic of allowing the novel's several narrators to intrude into Quixote's story and to interrupt it, deflects attention toward what might be called *the drama of the telling:* a drama concerned not with the protagonist's adventures themselves but with the problems and difficulties of writing about them. The *Quixote* is, among other things, the first—and probably the greatest—in a distinguished line of profoundly, openly self-conscious novels in which something like this drama of the telling is a decisive strategy. These books seem to me to be among the richest in the whole tradition of the novel, and, as the *Quixote* suggests, their elaborate self-reflexiveness makes them not peripheral to the tradition but central to it. In England this class of fiction is especially crucial, and extends in a line from Fielding through Sterne, Emily Brontë, and certain major works of Dickens to Conrad, Joyce, and Virginia Woolf.

Because novels of this sort understand that their commitment to the empirical, the ordinary world leads inevitably to a self-searching nominalism, their root subject is the idea of failure. Obsessed by the fragile and problematic nature of all human fictions, such novels usually force us to consider this subject from two separate angles. First, there are the failures acted out by the protagonists in the fiction: Don Quixote's failure to transform the world and his ultimate failure to sustain the fiction of his knightly identity; or the failure of Walter Shandy's scholarly ambitions; or Lord Jim's failure in the career of heroism. Second, there are the failures, or partial failures, enacted by those who try to tell about and understand these figures: Cide Hamete Benengeli's inability to credit all of Quixote's adventures; Tristram's comic ineptness as a systematic thinker and writer; Marlow's hesitant, self-conscious uncertainties in his role as Jim's interpreter. This division between protagonists and narrators calls attention to the distinctive way in which these novels force us to attend simultaneously to two separate stories, the second of which—what I have called the drama of the telling—pressing so intensely against the traditional "story" as to distract us from that story, as to rival it.

The rivalry is complicated, moreover, by the way in which such books insist that the whole imaginative enterprise which they embody is itself a

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contingent fiction, potentially at least a kind of failure; and also by the way in which the characters and events within such novels are similarly preoccupied with the meaning and uses of fictions. Thus, for one example, a recurring situation in the *Quixote* is the gathering together in inns and castles and forests of storyteller (or actor or puppetmaster) and audience, gatherings whose central purpose is to reveal the complexity and ambivalence of the human needs which give rise to fiction-making. Or again, in *Lord Jim*, Marlow's narrative difficulties, and the book's whole air of nervous incertitude, have a precise counterpart in all those moments in the story when Jim tries with increasing desperation to explain to others and to himself what has happened to him.

In the *Quixote* the parallels between the protagonist's story and the narrators' drama of the telling are significant in ways I've not yet indicated, and in ways that may help to explain the immense stature of Cervantes's book, which seems to me to understand its subject matter and to exploit its technical resources with unsurpassed subtlety and completeness. In any event, Cervantes's drama of the telling leads to the heart of his vision of experience, and specifically to his recognition that the impulse to fiction-making, far from being a Quixotic aberration, is a universal impulse, shared in some degree by all men.

The narrators' drama in the *Quixote* mirrors, or enacts in its sphere, a curious, comic, and finally immensely moving drama of increasing involvement and sympathy. Early in the novel the Spanish narrator who has paid a Moorish scribe to translate Cide Hamete's manuscript complains of Cide Hamete's failure to "let himself go in praise of such a worthy knight." But increasingly as the narrative continues Cide Hamete is driven to exclamations of personal involvement and even respect and affection for his subject. All the comic references to Cide Hamete's untrustworthiness come to have resonance now, for the distance between Moor and Christian, and especially between a Moor and a man whose chivalric enterprise has a particularly Christlike significance, has been bridged by sympathy, and culminates on the last page of the novel, in an assertion not just of sympathy but of identity, in Cide Hamete's address to his pen:

> For me alone was Don Quixote born and I for him. His was the power of action, mine of writing . . . . [W]e two are at one . . .

Cide Hamete's progress toward Quixote, an aspect of the drama of the telling, enacts in small the novel's drive toward a general sympathy and identification with Quixote. And something like this same pattern is present in the changing attitude of the Spanish narrator himself, who begins by complaining

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of Cide Hamete's lack of sympathy but ends, late in Part II, by extolling his meticulous insight and fairness. For the Spanish narrator, Cide Hamete has become a "renowned author" and Quixote is "fortunate" in his chronicler.

To emphasize Cide Hamete's growing affection for Quixote is not to suggest that the book means us to give simple assent to Quixote's madness, or to admire his fantasies unreservedly. The Broadway version of Quixote's story may romanticize his quest for the impossible dream, but Cervantes is free of such sentimentality. He is less interested in judging, or in asking us to judge Quixote, than he is in causing us to acknowledge, as Cide Hamete acknowledges, our kinship with him. The book seems to me finally reluctant to say that the exercise of imagination, the act of projecting fictions upon others and the world, is good or bad, though it does insist that our fictions define us in a partly moral sense. But mainly it wants to get at something more complicated and fundamental: that we make fictions about the world and ourselves automatically, inevitably, because we are alive and need to survive.

The novel associates fantasy, fiction-making, the human powers of imagination, with our impulse to free ourselves from various kinds of confinement, with our impulse to control our own lives, to assert our individual natures, as Sancho asserts his in the chapter I spoke of earlier. From this perspective Quixote is just an extreme version of what all men are, and if his lunacies are more extravagant and foolish than most, they have compensating purity and unselfishness. Sancho is right when, confronted by the tale of the bearded waiting women, he exclaims: "I swear I've never heard or seen, nor has my master ever related to me, nor so much as imagined, an adventure like this." The cruelty and grotesquerie of this adventure, the brainchild of the Duke and the Duchess, *is* beyond, or beneath, Quixote's less selfish and less manipulative imagination. The Duke and the Duchess, like all their entourage, indulge their imaginations for baser reasons than Quixote does, though the difference is perhaps one of degree and not of kind.

In any case, the crucial point is not that Quixote is a noble lunatic, a sainted fool—Cervantes is far more levelheaded, aware of Quixote's clownishness and even his dangerousness than many of his modern readers—but more simply and also more terribly, that he is a man:

> "Good Heavens!" exclaimed his niece. "What a lot you know, uncle! Why, at a pinch, you could get up in the pulpit or go and preach in the streets, and yet you're so blind and so palpably foolish that you'd have us think you're valiant when you are old; and strong when you're infirm; that you right wrongs when you're bent by age; and, worst of all, that you're a knight when you aren't, for though a gentleman can be one, a poor man can't!"

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Quixote's reluctance to accept confinement in age and circumstance, his need to create an identity for himself which denies, or tries to deny, that imprisonment is the source of his chivalric enterprise. And nearly all the characters in the novel, and the form of the book as well, make similar assertions of freedom, and with similar ambiguous unsuccess.

Even the priest and the barber, those embodiments of sanity (who nonetheless adopt roles with immense energy in their efforts to "cure" Quixote) are shown to be feebler and smaller versions of the lunatic to whom they condescend:

> They paid . . . [Quixote] a visit at last, and found him sitting up in bed, . . . so lean and withered that he seemed to be nothing but mummy-flesh . . . . In the course of their conversation they happened to discuss the principles of statecraft—as they are called—and methods of government, correcting this abuse and condemning that, reforming one custom and abolishing another, each one of the three setting up as a fresh legislator, a modern Lycurgus or a brand-new Solon. To such a degree did they refashion the commonwealth that it was as if they had taken it to the forge and brought away a different one.

The grotesquely elaborate charades arranged for Quixote and Sancho by the Duke and the Duchess through much of Part II clearly mark these characters as compulsive fictionizers, so extreme and insistent in their own way as to cause Cide Hamete to judge them "as mad as their victims," "fools themselves for taking such pain to play tricks on a pair of fools." And there is the suggestion that the reality from which both the Duke and the Duchess are in flight is not unlike the dispiriting circumstances against which Quixote revolts. For Doña Roderiguez, their abused servant, reveals that the Duke is in debt to a rich farmer whom he fears to displease, while the Duchess's handsome skirts hide running sores on her legs "through which she discharges all the ill humours of which the doctors say she is full."

A part of Cervantes's attitude toward fiction and imagination, then, involves this inclusive demonstration of the way in which people exercise their imaginations, invent fictions for themselves and for others, as a means of denying misery. But his sense of the question is broader than this alone, for his novel shows also that fiction-making is something playful and spontaneous, an assertion of exuberance and simple aliveness. The minor characters in the novel reveal this aspect of Cervantes's principal theme perhaps more clearly than the major figures, as the behavior of the Duke's servants suggests. Carefully schooled in the intricacies of their masters' plans for Quixote and Sancho, these servants nonetheless depart repeatedly from the roles assigned to them, introducing dramas and fictions of their own devising even at the risk of displeasing their masters. During the banquet which welcomes him to the

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Duke's castle, for example, Quixote is subjected to an elaborate ritual in which his beard and face are lathered by four servants, whose actors' skill convinces him that this strange ceremony is a local custom. The Duke and the Duchess "had been informed of none of this," we are told, and the "maids who were playing this trick kept their eyes lowered and dared not look at their master and mistress."

Again, late in the novel, as Quixote prepares to leave the Duke's castle, the "witty and wanton" Altisidora indulges in a parting surprise, accusing Quixote in an elaborate poetical complaint of stealing her kerchiefs and garters. The excessive literariness of Altisidora's performance, a rich parody of the deserted maiden's lament, explicitly associates the fictionizing impulses of the ordinary characters in the novel with Quixote himself and with the enterprise of art.

> The Duchess was astonished at Altisidora's effrontery. For although she knew she was bold, merry and not too moral, she would not have thought her so far gone as to proceed to such freedoms; and as she was not informed of this joke her wonder increased.

Altisidora shares this vital unpredictableness with many characters in the novel, notably with the artist-rogue, Ginés de Passamonte, whose reappearance in disguise as a magician and puppet master in Part II is a testament to his artist's gifts, which are the gifts of survival; and, most significantly, with Sancho himself, whose irrepressible loquacity and enlarging gift for comic inventiveness signal his increasing independence and freedom.

The very plot of the novel dramatizes this meaning, for as Sancho and Don Quixote grow to resemble one another through Part I and Part II, Sancho begins to control events, his master to be mastered by them. This double movement culminates, of course, midway through Part II when Sancho breaks away from his master to have his own adventures, while Quixote remains at the Duke's castle, passively suffering a series of banal torments and self-confined for most of this time in a single room.

In another, larger way, the structure of the *Quixote* embodies or dramatizes this tension between imaginative freedom and passive confinement. For if Part II is far more somber than Part I, its comedy constantly turning sour and grotesque, this is so in part because the narrative itself has accepted certain constraints, has committed itself to avoiding interpolated tales like those which interrupt Quixote's adventures in Part I. Cervantes is wholly conscious of this constriction, wholly conscious of the sacrifice in energy and comic inventiveness involved in Part II, for he has Cide Hamete complain that his sequel is "dry and cramped" because he has "restricted" himself to Quixote and Sancho, "not daring to launch out into digressions and episodes." Cide

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Hamete's lament continues through a long paragraph, in which the recurring imagery of imprisonment links his enclosure "in the narrow limits of the story" to the narrow, enclosed spaces and debased, bizarre adventures through which an increasingly weakened and passive Quixote moves in this later part of the book.

Imprisonment, binding, confinement are the master images of the novel, and emerge from the figures, the texture of the language, into the actuality of the plot very early in the story. One thinks, almost at random, of Quixote astride a hobbled Rocinante in the early adventure of the fulling mill, of Quixote caught and bound in comic fixity by Maritornes's rope, of Quixote literally encaged in the ominous confinement in which Part I ends. All these scenes, although they occur in the less somber first part, are latent or potential enactments, predictions of what is to come in the more destructive and lasting confinements Quixote will endure in Part II.

Late in the novel Quixote is ensnared by accident in some nets of green thread in the middle of a wood. The nets, it turns out, are part of the elaborate pastoral paraphernalia of a group of gentlefolk who have come into the wood to play at being Arcadians. This irony is very dreadful, for here Quixote is entangled in the nets of his own pastoral-chivalric fantasies. The sheep-killing of Part I prefigures this later episode, which is crucial for its revelation of the fact that Cervantes's understanding of Quixote—and his larger understanding of the reaches and limits of the imagination—is free of easy sentiment. For in these pastoral entrapments we see Quixote imprisoned and victimized by his own visions and definitions of himself. It is a small emblem of the whole action of Part II, in which the hero is continually seen in the role of victim, confined and mocked by the very identity he had established in Part I.

So, if our fictions can be liberating, they can also confine us. They are fragile, precarious, like the chivalric helmet Quixote makes for himself in the first chapter of the novel.

> [T]o see if . . . [his helmet] was strong enough to stand up to the risk of a sword-cut, he took out his sword and gave it two strokes, the first of which demolished in a moment what had taken him a week to make. He was not too pleased at the ease with which he had destroyed it, and to safeguard himself against this danger, reconstructed the visor . . . in such a way as to satisfy himself of his protection; and, not caring to make another trial of it, he accepted it as a fine jointed headpiece and put it into commission.

The justification for our fictions, the novel finally says, is that we cannot choose *not* to construct them, for our claims to identity and individuality have a fictive character, something we impose, or try to impose, on the world.

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All the vital, individuated characters in Cervantes's book are talkative, their verbalizing a contingent and intermittent but also genuine source of energy and strength. Sancho and Don Quixote talk after each disaster they suffer, and this talk, filled with generalizing proverbs that contain and try to make sense of catastrophe by assimilating it to verbal constructions—abstracting, shaping accounts of experience—this talk also creates their fraternity, dramatizes their reliance on one another. Like the stories narrated and the theatricals performed to audiences all through the novel, such talk testifies to the resilience of Cervantes's characters and is a source of community.

"In me," says Sancho early in the story, "the need to talk is a primary impulse." And Quixote, with his usual wisdom, observes in the same place: "Primary impulses are not within man's power to check."

Our talk itself, this book tells us, our smallest conversing, is a form of imaginative assertion, at one with the instinct that leads to the writing of novels. For Cervantes, the virtue of all such fictions is not that they are noble, but that because men make them—are driven to make them—they are, finally, part of the real world: a primary impulse of our human natures, an appetite or a need as insistent and as irrepressible as a proverb on the tongue of Sancho Panza.

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NOTES ON SPAIN

Pascual Maragall and Xavier Rubert de Ventos

EDITORS' NOTE: *"Notes on Spain" is excerpted from a longer account of the political situation in Spain, sent to us in January, 1975. The postscript was received in May.*

* * *

It is hard to imagine how much Spain has changed in the last four or five years and at the same time how much things are still the same.

The country has modernized. Highways (and tolls); thousands of brand-new little cars roaring everywhere; high-rise buildings; pop music; a middle class with a new game, investing in bonds and equities, and a new slang, stock-exchange jargon; a neat Europeanization of fashions (in fact of course, an Americanization, but without the lack of style that makes American fashions fascinating); higher wages—in a word, the thing that is called economic development, or at least economic growth.

At the same time, Spain is still a backward country. Everything is undersize, insufficient, middle-of-the-road, unoriginal. Everything lacks color in colorful Spain. Highways are congested as quickly as they are built. People are discontented with their lives. The cost of living, up 15-20 percent each year, eats up higher earnings. Even land speculation, the most prosperous industry in a country that is urbanizing at an incredible pace, has become risky as young radical planners have been called in to bring order to Spain's messy cities.

Politics have changed a bit. (Some would say a lot.) One can *talk* democracy and freedom and political parties to a degree that was unimaginable a few years ago (when people only thought and whispered about revolution). Yet the last word is (perhaps "was" when this piece gets to the reader) still that of Franco's supporters. The last word is, in fact, on the lips of a man who literally cannot speak: Franco is too old.

The point is, the regime is the same, and the same people speak for it.

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Only now they talk about change and democracy instead of merely anti-Communism. Their new language should not be taken as an expression of political goodwill. Far from it. These changes have been forced upon them by events; they are, in effect, changes produced in an effort to contain change, and the biggest mistake of all would be to forget that the armed forces' backing has always been the regime's surest weapon.

* * *

Two things happened to give at least the idea of politics in Spain a meaning. On December 20, 1973, Admiral Carrero Blanco, the linchpin of Franco's efforts to ensure that his regime survives him, was blown up by Basque nationalists. On April 25, 1974, the fascist post-Salazar regime in Portugal was overthrown by the military, backed by illegal left-wing parties.

The post-Carrero government, with Premier Arias Navarro at its head, had been trying to get across the following message: "We are fascists, you see, but we have chosen democracy—some sort of democratic clothing—to survive." On the one hand, on February 12, Arias publicly promised evolution toward a more democratic state; on the other, on March 2, Salvador Puig Antich, a Catalan anarchist who had killed a secret policeman in a Barcelona shoot-out, was executed, traditionally, by garotte, following a very traditional political trial.

The balancing act could have worked. But the Portuguese revolution suddenly altered the meaning of the February promises. The press, in only slightly veiled terms, urged the Chief of the High Military Staff to imitate Spinola. The key-words "apertura" (opening, evolution) and "espíritu del 12 de Febrero" (the date of Arias Navarro's first speech) seemed to be enough to cover all kinds of democratic manifestos in the newspapers. The new Minister of Information, Pio Cabanillas, allowed it to go on. Many new, and newly outspoken, magazines appeared.

In Spain "the future" means—unless otherwise stated—the period following the dictator's death. In July 1974, Franco was hospitalized for the first time since the Civil War. Then came Greece. From Cyprus until the anti-monarchial referendum in December, the fall of the Greek Junta was used as a weapon by evolutionists inside the system. In effect, the Portuguese-Greek alternative was a paradigm of "how things ought to go and ought not to go." Greece was the insider's illustration of the "correct" way of fascism; Portugal, the example for the illegal opposition.

Preparations for the future had become, for Spain, open during Franco's illness, and they continued to be even after the throwback following the explosion of a bomb near the headquarters of the national police in Madrid.

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Some intellectuals were arrested, supposedly for having helped Basque nationalists in the bombing, for it had served perfectly to create an atmosphere of anxiety within the government. The Minister of Information was fired; the liberal Minister of Finance resigned in sympathy, and a number of voluntary resignations and dismissals followed. Arias himself was said to be on the verge of quitting.

The real decision making, of course, is done in the corridors of El Pardo, Franco's official residence, and at the private dinner parties of rival or allied figures. After some lobbying, Arias worked out a compromise. He would stay if his proposed Law of Political Associations was passed before the end of the year. The bill was presented on television by an apparently disappointed Arias, who pleaded for patience and understanding. Under the bill, associations must be passed on by the Consejo Nacional de Movimiento—the remains of the old Fascist party, now a sort of consultative body. The mere possibility of a public quarrel among Franco's heirs about who is going to get what scares the ultra-rightists. It looks, however, very much like the last scene in this period of Spanish political life.

* * *

Who would be elected if free elections were held tomorrow in Spain? Nobody knows for sure. This is what worries the moderate right, as well as its foreign friends, starting with the United States.

Only the conservatives and the far right are likely to be able to pull together; forming associations also serves their needs. What is important here is that the resources that the Francoists are accustomed to draw upon are at odds with those needed for the future, and they know it—from Girón, the old hard-line Falangist leader whose words today are reminiscent of a certain period of Peronism, to Fraga Iribarna, the ex-Minister of Information who presents himself as a man of the center ready to make a coalition with the "left" (that is Christian and Social Democrats), to those long-time monopolists of government posts called the Opus Dei.

They ruled for many years beneath Franco's shadow, allowing him to make and unmake strange combinations and trade-offs among them, as long as this was the safest way for the Spanish oligarchy and bureaucracy, which they all represent, to go on clipping the coupons of economic development. The secret of Franco's so-called unique skill in arbitrating conflicts is that he was and is the resultant vector of their forces, rather than an external ruler imposed by the military on the wealthy.

The success of these classes in retaining power had depended, in great measure, on their capacity for self-effacement whenever necessary. Now this is

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no longer a viable way of creating governments that represent a balance of their interests. They feel the need for public debate and traditional parliamentary practices. They need to know "who is who" in a society that they rule but don't quite know. They need a different and more rigorous selection process for their political representatives in the transition period ahead.

But even if nobody knows who would win a national election, many of the people on the top *sense* that they would be wiped out if such a free contest were held. Now, no ruling class in its right mind is likely to organize such an election. It is more likely to crumble before such an event occurs. This is why their provisional unanimity is now based on the catch-word "Hurry up!"

Upon this complicated mixture of self-deception and truth, a tacit pact is probably in the making between the regime's more liberal and intelligent figures and the more hard pressed among the illegal opposition, at the expense both of regime hard liners and the radical oppositionists, who urge "ruptura" rather than "apertura."

* * *

Last November 14, not long before public discussion in the Consejo Nacional of Arias's bill on political associations, there was a meeting in Madrid of various democratic and evolutionist leaders. The leaders were absent when the police arrived; they hurried to Dirección General de Seguridad and tried to be arrested—without success. Prime Minister Arias then managed to leak to the press his ignorance of the raid. Those who *were* arrested represented all the forces said to be in contact with the Prime Minister before October: Catalan democrats and social democrats, Spanish socialists like Felipe Gonzalez, and social democrats like Dionisio Ridruejo, an ex-Falangist leader who was welcomed as a traitor in the political police headquarters, the son of General Diaz Alegria, the chief of staff urged last February to emulate Spinola, and others.

These are the people waiting just behind the door. They won't enter the association game, but they won't openly boycott it either if they are assured that the bill is only a beginning. Their chances would be good in an election. They have money, political experience, and access to the media, in varying degrees. Above all they are outsiders, not insiders. But they have no grass roots organization, with the exception of the P.S.O.E., the Spanish Socialist Party. Still, it is only a baby compared to the Communist Party; its strength no more than that of an infant compared to the total force of the revolutionary groups to the C.P.'s left.

And here lies the problem. If the evolution gets "out of hand," these

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moderate groups probably wouldn't be able to guarantee an orderly return to democratic "normality" without the help of the C.P. But the Communists can't by definition be made part of any plan acceptable to the evolutionists, because if they were, the far right, the bureaucrats, and the military would not be alone in asking: "Why the hell did we fight the war?" Most of the Spanish bourgeoisie would raise the question.

* * *

The Communist Party plays a central role in the whole affair. Its force has been patiently amassed through a thousand fights and lately also through clever bargaining with the monarchists, such as Areilza and Calvo Serer (both followers of Don Juan, not Juan Carlos), Catalan industrialists and bankers such as Durán Farrell, Trias Fargas, and Jordi Pujol, and all the middle-class democratic groups outside the law.

Democratic leaders, evolutionist insiders, liberal generals like Diaz Alegria, and Nicolás Franco himself, a nephew of the dictator and a prominent figure in Prince Juan Carlos' staff—all are secretly, and anxiously, getting in touch with the Communists. The party itself isn't denying the contacts are being made. It openly advocates a "pact for freedom" in exchange for legal recognition and minimal liberties. It was a prime mover in the coalition of monarchists and businessmen, called the Junta Democrática, that formed in Paris during Franco's illness in July '74.

It is not hard to see how, even though the word "Communist" is taboo to the people on top, many of the political men representing similar interests feel impelled to deal directly with the C.P.

Five thousand members strong (according to a cautious 1972 State Department estimate), the Spanish C.P. is a well-oiled machine that publishes five papers and magazines, has infiltrated the official unions at the factory and even at the city or provincial level. It could easily quiet the more radical groups that squabble all over the country by imposing on them the hypothetical terms of a hypothetical agreement with evolutionists and mild democrats.

The party's main target now is the army (the Portuguese alliance serves them well as an example). For unless the armed forces are, at the least, passive about the possibility of the C.P. holding positions of power, there's no clear way in for them. They probably wouldn't use the old slogan of a national or general strike (it's more and more the property of the extreme left, anyway), except as a tactical show of force to clear the way for compromise. The C.P. is playing a waiting game. Since Carrero was killed, it has cooled off mass movements; and Santiago Carrillo, the party's general secretary has said that the Communists would accept a monarchy freely chosen by the people. (But

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he is also said to have told Nicolás Franco that the only thing the Communists expect from Juan Carlos is that he'll quit.)

To the left of the C.P. are the Maoists and Trotskyists. Since '68, they've been strong in the universities and even high schools, and among the illegal teachers' unions; they also have a constituency among the working class, in the factory and the neighborhood. But on the whole, after a period of anti-liberal "leftism," the Maoist and Trotskyist groups joined democratic coalitions with the C.P., the socialists, and Christian Democrats. A case in point is the Assembly of Catalonia, a huge illegal body embracing all the parties and also Catalan autonomists. Perhaps the broadest based of the political groups in the country, it's been around for years, meets and is trailed by the political police every once in a while.

From the Assembly could come a provisional government for Catalonia. But the C.P. and its right-wing allies in the Junta Democrática might bypass the Catalan Assembly in order to make a quick deal. Evolutionists, particularly if they're army men, or have held government jobs, are likely to be uncomfortable with the prospect of a truly popular state. As the Democratic Junta's manifesto proclaimed: "The non-continuity of the Regime is required for the continuity of the state."

* * *

Evolutionists are also not likely to recognize that the question of national minorities is a live one, for one of the principles that has unified the upper class and the bourgeois elite around Franco is his insistence on "the unity of Spain's lands and peoples"—a direct reference both to the necessity that those classes (including the Basque and Catalan industrialists and bankers) felt for a unified, protected national market, and to the centralist feelings of the Castilian rural and urban middle-class from which come many state and army officials.

To the extent that the Civil War of 1936-39 protected the interests of capital in general, much of the northern business world in Catalonia and Euzkadi supported Franco at the price of their national pride and their interest in free enterprise. Today, however, the northern middle class is no longer willing to swallow Castilian centralism, and the northern rich see that the Francoist Regime is not able to get them into the Common Market. Understanding that the slogan of Spain's unity appears to them a mere cover for continuing an inept, dictatorial Regime that is unable to cope with domestic diversity and foreign challenge makes it easier to understand the Catalan Assembly, and, more important, the wide support for the nationalist movement ETA (Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna, or "Basque Country and free-

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dom''). When an ETA commando ''executed'' Carrero Blanco, the initials of this organization became magic words for most people. ''ETA had dared.'' A long history of fear and hate began to be rationalized. The ''quiet maturity of the Spanish people,'' which the Regime heralded at that moment, was only the passivity brought by momentary shock. It belies the officials' own certainty that someday everything is going to change overnight after a sign is written on the wall.

They simply couldn't believe that Carrero had been blown over a church wall and their own heads were still on their shoulders. Arias, after all, in 1939 was the ''Jackal of Malaga.'' Mayalde, vice president of the puppet Parliament, was the man who travelled to Nazi-occupied France to get the President of the Republican autonomous Government of Catalonia, Lluis Companys, and bring him to Barcelona to have him executed. And so on.

Salvador Puig Antich's execution is only one of the most recent on a long list. It took place after those at the top were unable even to explain who the executors of Carrero Blanco were, and it was meant to make clear that it was *they* who had decided ''to go democratic.'' Their names, the execution was meant to signify, were *not* on the wall.

Yet democratization is simply too late. It could have worked in 1945. It could also have worked in 1957-59, when the Opus Dei, speaking a technocratic, Europeanized language, began to give the cabinet a ''new look.'' It could even have worked a couple of years ago, when the crisis of the West did not seem as plain as it does today, when Caetano and Papadopoulos were still in power and post-Gaullism reigned in France. Not today. This is what the ousted Opus Dei and the collaborationist Christian Democrats whisper in Franco's ear. Today an ''opening'' means a ''break,'' and the only way to stop ETA is to give in to democratic pressures more than is safe for the regime.

And in fact, there are few chances of ''opening'' without ''breaking'' the regime. But there is also no clear way of reassuring the executioners, tracked and trapped by ETA commandos, denounced by a freer press and despised by everybody. That is, there is no way to continue to balance political punishment with a show of democratization that does not include opening wide enough to bring in the moderates for such a policy mix. In sum, the political equations have no straightforward solution so long as the figures in the regime remain tied to an evermore burdensome and decrepit Franco.

It has yet to be seen whom the military will support. An attempt on the part of the more fascist generals to block any democratization could tip the balance in favor of the Democratic Junta among the more liberal military men. Confrontations have already taken place between the army's political extremes. Middle-of-the-road military men, it is assumed, will back Juan

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Carlos, even though the Prince is not their political dream. This again is the Democratic Junta's biggest problem. Juan Carlos could count on this diffuse military support to win short-term recognition by the democratic forces if he enacts a program of change not too different from that advanced by the Junta's Manifesto.

This is why 1975 could be the year of the hasty coronation of Juan Carlos, and then of his overthrow.

* * *

What about the intellectuals? Theirs is a long story. From the end of the war through the fifties, those still alive in Spain collaborated culturally, hoping to give some kind of formal expression to the fascist "idearium." Finally, the last of them defected—the Falangists to Marxism, the Catholics to a more liberal Catholicism. And in fact, liberal Catholicism became for a while the only way to express the longing for social and cultural change.

Since the mid-sixties the Spanish intelligentsia has been responding to the same currents as have Western intellectuals. The new influences made themselves felt in milder and second-hand forms perhaps, but they contrasted more sharply with a flat and insipid past. The crisis of the myth of unlimited growth; the collapse of welfare statism; the sense of a cultural limbo which despite repression had come over the Pyrennees to Madrid and Barcelona along with the Spanish economic miracle; since 1968, disillusion with "revolution now"; since 1971, disillusion with the "cultural revolution"—all have meant that the intellectuals' political and social concerns have turned back to classic political and nationalist issues (whether Basque or Catalan). In the early sixties, the Spanish intellectuals had incarcerated themselves in the clandestine political parties. But now, their sensitivity to what they see as imperial patronization—of the Social Democrats by the Americans; of the Communists by the Soviet Union; of the Christian Democrats by the Vatican—has meant many of them have joined socialist reconstruction platforms. It remains to be seen how they will steer their way through two clear dangers: The Scylla of leftists' intellectualism, the creation of a party of and for the intellectuals à la the P.S.U.; and the Charybdis of pure electoralism.

* * *

The Spanish oligarchy, it has been argued, needs America as much as America seems to need Spain. The United States' military presence, the argument goes, can be used as a symbol to discourage domestic upheaval.

And Franco's Spain, it's true, has been useful to the United States, as an

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investment as well as a defense base. But it is possible, after all, that the American interest, as interpreted by Mr. Kissinger, will see itself better served by Arias than by Carrero and his technocrats in the Opus Dei, ousted after his death.

The essential question, after all, is stability, in the European defense alliance as well as in Spain. The Opus Dei was instrumental in Juan Carlos's nomination as Franco's successor but, as the confusion of last summer clearly shows, was unable to manage a transition. Portugal has meant another change in the balance of power in the Mediterranean requiring, in the State Department's view, a more flexible Spanish Government than the Carrero-Opus Dei combine, reminiscent of Gaullist pride and blindness.

Perhaps for ideological as well as strategic reasons, Kissinger has implied that the European Social Democrats should be both more concrete and more flexible in what they ask of Spanish officials. He would, apparently, like to see a strong, Western-oriented Social Democratic force loosen the C.P.'s grip on the popular opposition movement.

Until a few months ago, the Spanish Communists, like the Italians to whom they are closely linked, were not on very good terms with the Soviet Union. Ironically, this fact probably militated against the American interest, since America is not essentially anti-Soviet, but rather, anti-socialist and anti-Communist. As capitalists begin to think of the Soviets less as the Fathers of Socialism and more as trading partners, the best guarantee of a "good boy" C.P. in Spain, or in any European country, is a Soviet-oriented C.P., respectful of Soviet-American agreements.

Hence, perhaps, the surprising reconciliation of the U.S.S.R. and the Spanish C.P. last fall. The new friendship will increase the party's credibility to the right.

Spain, it's been said, might tip the balance of Europe to socialism. Such prophesies add little to a correct understanding of events. But the American left should be awake to the need for blocking the tendency of America to prevent further advances toward socialism.

P.S. The latest international developments seem to validate what we've said above. Efforts (including American) to get Franco to retire in favor of Juan Carlos, on the basis of a limited "democratic" pact embracing the moderate left and excluding Communists and ETA independentists, continue. President Ford's visit to Madrid should be understood against this background.

Divisions within the military led some of them (like Comandante Bosquests and Capitán Julbe) to approach democratic oppositionists (and be arrested); they only accelerated maneuvers in the circles and around the regime.

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The danger of isolation is leading the purists in the C.P. to forget their divisions over the question of the "opportunism" of the Junta Democrática. Meanwhile, the emergence of broad socialist groups outside of the C.P. and the Junta indicates how determined more and more people are to fight an easy transition towards an adulterated franquism without Franco. Above all, ETA's fight against the para-military and political police illustrates the sharpness of the contradictions the regime has been breeding for 35 years.

It cannot evolve short of a radical democratic rupture.

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BOOKS

NABOKOV'S RAINBOW

LOOK AT THE HARLEQUINS. By Vladimir Nabokov. McGraw-Hill. $7.95.

"But I," says Count Ludovico, "imagining with my selfe often times how this grace commeth, leaving apart such as have it from above, finde one rule that is most generall, which in this part (me thinke) taketh place in all things belonging to a man in word and deede, above all other. And that is to eschue as much as a man may, and as a sharp and daungerous rocke, too much curiousness, and (to speake a new word) to use in everye thing a certain disgracing to cover arte withall, and seeme whatsoever he doth and saith, to doe it without paine, and (as it were) not minding it." This admonition in *The Book of the Courtier* comes readily to mind as one reads *Look at the Harlequins* and watches the novel break on that sharp and dangerous rock. For Nabokov's diffident style with its casually brilliant asides and sudden tropes has always reflected Castiglione's understanding of *sprezzatura*, artless art, and yet, since *Ada* and particularly in this novel, Nabokov has seemed trapped in the ingenuity of his curiousness. The ease with which he sets scenes and introduces characters (or removes them with the crack of a pistol) has become increasingly mechanical; it is not surprise but familiarity that has come to matter in his fiction, and as a result his wit has begun to wear, to show signs of garrulity.

Look at the Harlequins is the farcical recitation of Nabokov's literary career, a synoptic retelling of old Nabokovian tales that is at times excessively rich in its self-indulgence. "In the world of athletic games there has never been, I think," Vadim McNab observes, "a World Champion of Lawn Tennis *and* Ski; yet in two Literatures, as dissimilar as grass and snow, I have been the first to achieve that kind of feat." But there is a difference in showing and telling. The feat of this novel, it would seem, is to be superb in certain episodes and passages and to fail overall as a fiction. As McNab hustles his rep in *Look at the Harlequins*, the line between funny arrogance and preening narcissism is not always discernible. How would Castiglione have regarded the

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basket-shod, overcoated, umbrella-holding style of Bobby Riggs's tennis game, or a novel entitled *See under Real*? Where would he have drawn the line?

Yet there are those aforesaid episodes and passages, moments when Nabokov's game on the English grass is very good indeed. There is a parrot in *Look at the Harlequins*, a metaphysical bird magnificent in the conceit it gives Nabokov. "It was a large, lemon-breasted, indigo-blue ara with striped white cheeks squawking intermittently on its bleak back-porch perch. Ivor had dubbed it Mata Hari partly because of its accent but chiefly by reason of its political past. His late aunt, Lady Wimberg, when already a little gaga, around Nineteen Fourteen or Fifteen, had been kind to that tragic old bird, said to have been abandoned by a shady stranger with a scarred face and a monocle. It could say *allô*, Otto, and pa-pa, a modest vocabulary, somehow suggestive of a small anxious family in a hot country far from home. Sometimes when I work too late and the spies of thought cease to relay messages, a wrong word in motion feels somehow like the dry biscuit that a parrot holds in its great slow hand." And there is the Dean's farewell at Quirn College. "He grasped my hand in a burst of brutal effusion. Certain fastidious blue-blooded animals prefer surrendering a limb to the predator rather than suffer ignoble contact. I left the Dean encumbered with a marble arm that he kept carrying in his prowlings like a trayed trophy, not knowing where to put it down." But from the title of the narrator's first novel in Russian, *Tamara*, to the false name (Dumbert Dumbert) he hastily inscribes in the ledger when courting Dolly von Borg in New York, almost everything else in the book is tautly referential. At times these keys fall with a heavy clunk, other times with a subtle clink, but in any case they are omnipresent. The doors they open, moreover, do not lead inward to the narrator's narrator, the unmasked harlequin, but rather disclose only the same puzzles and perplexities this figure created in other guises, the *Pnin* that might have been *Dr. Olga Repnin*, the Kinbote who is "real" and the Shade he invents. Thus numerous variations are played, all sorts of literary connections and opinions offered, but they distract more than they engage, and in their allusive superabundance disguise the constancy of Nabokov's themes, the sameness of his topics, the considerable limitation of his fiction.

The passions that link Nabokov's novels, as his various narrators insist, are pathological. In *Look at the Harlequins* Vadim is always trying to explain his madness to friends and lovers who live comfortably and superficially in the present tense, in the real world. They do not understand his Shandian sense of how the self is created, that mania for turning back to recreate and improve the past. But the real world, particularly the Marxist-Leninist version, has not been kind to displaced Russian aristocrats in the twentieth century. "Stop moping!" the Baroness Bredow declares. "Look at the harlequins!" Which? Where? "All around you. Trees are harlequins, words are harlequins. So are

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situations and sums. Put two things together—jokes, images—and you get a triple harlequin. Come on! Play! Invent the world! Invent reality!'' Inspired advice. Be brilliant or be eaten. For the menaced Russian emigré was necessarily two, if not more, persons in postwar Europe, one mired in a pension in Berlin, making do, and the other alive in a mythical Russia, a Nova Zembla as liberal and broad as the imagination itself. What he is is surely poorer and less human than what he was. The hero of *Mary* finally prefers the remembered Mary to the historical Mary who at the end of the novel comes to Berlin to meet him, a rush of vivid time he avoids by leaving Berlin before her long-anticipated arrival. This divided, antithetical self is present in almost all Nabokov's novels, Russian and English. Look at the harlequin, Vadim tells his second significant lover at one point, indicating the creature, and she responds, flicking it away, ''a most ordinary nettlefly (*krapivnitsa*).'' But the nettlefly's survival depends on that illusion—and in that instant the fate of Vadim's second marriage is decided.

So there it is, the brute world presses in on this stateless, uprooted Russian sensibility. Space and time are indeed problems: where will he live, where is home, and what is history but a succession of displacements, different hotels in different decades? Reality is the enemy, a combination of commissars, prosaic wives, and Gravity. ''My battle with factual, respectable life still consisted of sudden delusions, sudden reshufflings!—kaleidoscopic, stained-glass reshufflings!—of fragmented space. I still felt Gravity, that infernal and humiliating contribution to our perceptual world, grow into me like a monstrous toenail in stabs and wedges of intolerable pain (incomprehensible to the happy simpleton who finds nothing fantastic and agonizing in the escape of a pencil or penny *under* something—under the desk on which one will live, under the bed on which one will die).'' The response is artistic, life not here but there, the nettlefly's butterfly life, and yet Gravity pulls and the task for Vadim is to bring his two tales together, the story of his stories and the story of his life, books and wives, desks and beds, self and self. This is the morality spoken in his recurrent nightmare. ''In actual, physical life I can turn as simply and swiftly as anyone. But mentally, with my eyes closed and my body immobile, I am unable to switch from one direction to the other. Some swivel cell in my brain does not work. I can cheat, of course, by setting aside the mental snapshot of one vista and leisurely selecting the opposite view for my walk back to my starting point. But if I do not cheat, some kind of atrocious obstacle, which would drive me mad if I persevered, prevents me from imagining the twist which transforms one direction into another, directly opposite. I am crushed, I am carrying the whole world on my back in the process of trying to visualize my turning around and making myself see in terms of 'right' what I saw in terms of 'left' and vice versa.'' We learn later the ostensible solution to this conundrum. He has confused direction and duration, mistaken time for space. ''Why then is it so extraordinary that he

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cannot imagine himself turning on his heel? Nobody can imagine in physical terms the act of reversing the order of time. Time is not reversible." At which point, having invoked Heraclitus ("All is flux, nothing is stationary"), the narrator breaks into Being; he is here, and the book ends, but not before this resolution, happily forwarded by the conclusive wife, is undercut as only provisional in its sufficiency. There is, of course, no solution to that paradox and no possible suturing of selves. "The I of the book/Cannot die in the book." The text is as much Vadim's prison as the blunted body that bears him about in the wrong world.

And that, too, is the problem of *Look at the Harlequins*. Because Nabokov imprisons his readers in its closed echoing space as well, reminds them how good *Ada* (*Ardis*) is, how incorrectly received, gives covert thanks to Hugh Hefner, rebukes Soviet architecture, gets in a whack or two at psychoanalysis, settles some old scores at Cornell, and in short provides steady work for a generation of annotators who in some future critical edition will make the text look as formidably dead as the Twickenham *Dunciad*. Unlike John Barth or Thomas Pynchon, Nabokov comfortably inhabits the funhouse. It is still Forsterian to him, the place in which connections are plotted and patterns woven. Here, then, the career is comically recited and its significance assessed, but this novel about novels, while it throws open numerous passages, also exhibits their narrowness. One reverts to that image of Vadim shutting his eyes in order to turn back and imaginatively restore past experience (Proust in his insulated room), a performance of blinding that none of his lovers (who belong to the world of flux) find interesting, but which, if successful, would enable him to taste again the cakes of Tsarskoe. That world returns, memory speaks and retrieves the cakes, an old aunt, the dead soldier in a Polish forest, the small incestuous community of Russian exiles, the small incestuous community of the American college, and it also circumscribes. It is true, as V. S. Pritchett suggests, that Vadim's abortive trip to Leningrad does not somehow come off in the novel, but why is this so? Because there is no text through which to see that ugly place with its ugly folk and ugly odors. It is the dark world Gravity rules, and while Vadim passes through it his perspective, framed by ancient grudges, blinds the reader. The world in Nabokov's fiction is as exact and restricted as the world rendered in Jane Austen's novels.

At a time when a great deal of modern criticism seems intent on exorcising the relevance of intentionality in writing, depriving the author of his authority, and when writing itself seems content to follow this direction, to become anonymous, here, like some great relic of the nineteenth century, an Austenian Proust, still copious, still sure, Nabokov angles for the Nabokovians.

Neil Schmitz

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THE NEW LATIN AMERICAN NOVEL

CONVERSATION IN THE CATHEDRAL. By Mario Vargas Llosa. Translated by Gregory Rabassa. Harper & Row. $12.50.

COBRA. By Severo Sarduy. Translated by Suzanne Jill Levine. E.P. Dutton. $8.95.

The boom in Latin American fiction, at least as it reaches us, is thunder resounding after lightning that struck several countries at once. Our distance from the source distorts our relation to the cause and just as we start listening to what we have been hearing, someone like Victoria Ocampo asks, "The boom? Well, it's over, isn't it?" while Suzanne Jill Levine, in the preface to her latest translation says, "*Cobra* represents, in many ways, the culmination of the New Latin American Novel. Perhaps, to suggest an even more apocalyptical vision, it represents a turning point in the course of the novel form." Instant apocalypses—not to speak of those that are "turning points"—aggravate our literature-lag; they stun and confuse us, especially when what we're after is some sense of genesis.

Whatever else may be said about the origins of the New Latin American Novel, one thing is certain: the phenomenon took decisive impetus from Borges's *Universal History of Infamy*, which he published as a book in 1935. It is found not so much in the actual pages of that skinny collection as in the writer's attitude implicit in them and explicit in his prefaces where he first calls his work "exercises in prose narrative" and then refers to it as "the irresponsible game of a timid man who didn't dare to write stories and who amuses himself in falsifying and distorting (sometimes without esthetic justification) the stories of other people." "Exercises" and "irresponsible game" are the signal words here: the writer considers himself in relation to his writing and his writing in relation to other writings, rather than considering his work's relation to its possible referents in the nonliterary world. In other words, language, style, and form are the focus, and that notorious "anthropological interest" of Latin American literature is discarded or subordinated.

I'm not suggesting that subsequent works that are a part of the boom have all made an identical subordination. Certainly not. But I am saying that they have consistently proceeded from a similar attitude, measuring achievement not by the extent to which the work is *engagé*, but to the degree that it is *écriture*. Beyond that, I'm suggesting that those boom works which have least claimed our attention are precisely those in which the degree of social, political, or cultural commitment is the highest or most obvious.

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Take the works of Mario Vargas Llosa for example. Of all the boom novels, his are probably the least known and the least admired in this country. Yet in the 1960s he produced three major works: *The Time of the Hero* (original title *La ciudad y los perros*, 1962), *The Green House* (1966), and *Conversation in the Cathedral* (1969). In each of these novels, Vargas Llosa has anatomized Peru and its capital city Lima, and he has done so with an elaborate technique that calls upon devices reminiscent of authors as diverse as Robbe-Grillet and Flaubert. His latest work to be translated, *Conversation in the Cathedral*, for example, opens with an epigraph from Balzac: "*Il faut avoir fouillé toute la vie sociale pour être un vrai romancier, vu que le roman est l'histoire privée des nations.*" *Conversation* does in fact thumb the entire book of Peruvian society, intercutting the lives of characters from every segment and class in the great tradition of the classic novel. In this way, Vargas Llosa fulfills his obligations as "*un vrai romancier*" at the same time that he observes his own definition of the novelist as one of the "professional discontents, the conscious or unconscious disturbers of society, the rebels with a cause, the unredeemed insurrectionists of the world." His novel is critical, it is social, it is political as it sets out to answer a question asked on the first page: "He was like Peru, Zavalita was, he'd fucked himself up somewhere along the line. He thinks: when?" As the large story unfolds, revealing the inside and outside of every situation, every life, the microcosm and the macrocosm of Peru, which are perfect reflections of each other, the twin message of that opening page reiterates itself with depressing clearness: "everybody all fucked up . . . there's no solution."

Yet it is in the novel's unfolding—or rather its refusal to unfold, as it zig zags, back tracks, and leaps forward in an achronological line that is more plotting than plot—that Vargas Llosa's particular genius presents itself. After all, the corruption at the top, the thwarted, misguided dreams at the bottom, the copping out in the middle, the sexual "perversions" throughout as indications of contamination, are all, unfortunately, commonplace and commonplaces. What is not common is Vargas Llosa's application of a virtually cubist narrative technique to this sordid and melodramatic material.

The book begins with the meeting of Zavala, rebel son of a rich family with governmental connections, and the black who used to be his father's chauffeur. They go to a dive—part bar, part diner, part brothel—called the Cathedral, where they tell each other their respective stories, intermingling other conversations involving a cross section of Lima's society. From the start the book is chiefly spoken and unspoken speech; and the dialogue, as in the snippet I quoted from the first page, merges with the narration, frequently without signal punctuation, since everything, except perhaps the opening sentences, is part of the collective monologue which is the conversation in the Cathedral. Because of the book's social concern we do not read stream of

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consciousness or "internal" and "external" psychologism, but private and public reports of what happened—why and how. We meet some characters privately before we meet them publicly, and motives or actions are often out of chronological sequence. Hence a large part of the interest in *Conversation* is in putting the pieces together, a process of remembering and recognition. Arrangement, then, of characters and events is the beauty of the book, while the juxtaposed parts themselves tend toward a purposeful drabness, reminding you not so much of the buzz of conversation as of a steady hum, like that of an electric typewriter turned on and left to run.

Not a difficult book to understand but, precisely, a hard one to read, *Conversation* lacks that flashing imagination evident almost everywhere in the boom literature. Yet, in its monumental breadth and architecture it is one of the most important novels to come out of Latin America. By conjoining the technical flatness of the French New Novel, the simultaneous effect of the fair scene in *Madame Bovary*, and the spectrum of society from Balzac, *Conversation* becomes a halfway house between the social criticism exaggerated in Asturias and the "pure form" exhibited by Borges; it is a powerful solution to a problem facing every contemporary novelist in Latin America. And in the dignity of its solution and the rigor of its method, *Conversation* is a novel worthy of them all, and of every North American reader as well.

Severo Sarduy's *Cobra*, on the other hand, explicitly turns its back on the boom novelists, dismissing them in a footnote: "if even with these clues, thick as posts, you have not understood. . . abandon this novel and devote yourself to screwing or to reading the novels of the Boom, which are much easier." From the start it thumbs its nose at certain writers, and at its own readers too, but with humor and wit that may compensate for the exasperation of reading it. For while we may look at *Conversation* as a mature, intelligent compromise between a literature of commitment and a literature of literature, *Cobra* is uncompromising in pursuing the writer's relation to his writing, and his writing's relation to his and others' writing instead of to the natural world.

The aspiration of the novel and of its transvestite hero clearly transcends those of commitment:

> COBRA. "My God"—on the record player Sonny Rollins, of course—"why did you bring me into the world if it wasn't to be absolutely divine?"—she moaned naked on an alpaca rug, among fans and Calder mobiles.

And as we follow the hero—if indeed we are able—through a bloody metamorphosis into a Garbo-like trans-sexual and eventually, I think, into a ritualized corpse, we see that the demands Cobra makes on God are comparable to those Sarduy makes on his literature: to achieve a kind of divinity by purity

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of form (sex/language), which in the novel means loosening the grip of Plot on Word, freeing Character from Personality, Subject from Theme and thus creating a "divine" book which is its own hero, plot and subject—that is, a work of words. Individual words and even vocables reign supreme here. So *Cobra* is essentially paratactic in its entirety as well as in its elements, repeatedly devolving through series of clauses, words, and letters toward the smallest elements in discourse as it echoes, quotes, and parodies itself and other texts (including Sarduy's). Ms. Levine is right, then, in pointing out that *Cobra* is a culmination of boom literature as a text about itself.

In fact, *Cobra* is a theory of the text and its embodiment at the same time; it is spirit and flesh in "divine" incarnation. As such, it is difficult, mysterious, fascinating, funny, weird, and horrifying. Explicitly structuralist, with allusions to such as Lacan and Derrida, the book delights in counterpointing seemingly precise, pseudo-scientific language and decadently lush prose in such a way that we are always getting "the story" and a conception of that story at the same time. Here is an especially clear example from the chapter "To God I Dedicate This Mambo," where the opening sentences and first footnote describe the two queens (Cobra and Cadillac), the Madam, and a dwarf double of Cobra named Pup:

> Like a goose's neck, the envious Cadillac's arm undulates in the mist, plumed white on the gloomy platform. The three are going away, or the two which add up to three[1] . . .
>
> [1] [Mme. + Cobra (+ / =) Pup = (3/2)]

Self-consciously newer than the "New" novel, *Cobra* does about as well as some of Gertrude Stein's works at getting the story out of fiction, but *Cobra* does it with a uniquely quicksilver, campy, tony, cool prose. Deliberately not a reader's writer, Sarduy is already having an important effect on writers in Latin America and France, where he has been greeted enthusiastically. Perhaps we should recall that Borges, too, was often called a writer's writer until readers caught up with him. In its direct challenge to the nature of fiction and the act of reading *Cobra* is surely the most decisive book to be published in Latin America since Borges's *History of Infamy*.

Certainly it is the most decisive to be translated into English. Its difficulty is inherently decisive, and both *Cobra* and *Conversation* constitute Herculean tasks for the translators, so their appearance here says a good deal about the state of translation from Spanish into English. How successful they will be is another question. Neither fits the formula: *Conversation* is not witty or fantastic, and Vargas Llosa is unrelenting in keeping the focus of his elaborate technique on "*la vie sociale*"; *Cobra* is not *engagé*, except in the sense that it is committed to writing, but Sarduy never lets you forget that his work is a

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self-reductive system of ingrown relations. Furthermore, the books make heavy demands on the reader. Because *Conversation* offers all the familiar pleasures of character and plot, but in an unfamiliar format of narrative editing equivalent to film montage, and because *Cobra* exhibits nuggets of prose and outrageous wit, but in a histrionic text of acute self-reflexiveness, these books may gratify the reader though they certainly train him to reading that is often austerely difficult, coldly problematic. The question is this: are we ready for that sort of thing in our new-formed relationship with Latin American literature? The blurbs and prefaces to these books, with their creaky references to "levels" of vision or meaning and "keys" to understanding (that antiquated way of reading fiction as if it were a locked apartment house and we, thieves in search of a *passe par tout*), don't offer much hope for a genuine response to the books' originality. However, if such a response develops, it will do much to challenge our notions of what we have learned to like and dislike in contemporary Latin American fiction.

Ronald Christ

AMERICA, AMERICA

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS: THE KNACK OF SURVIVAL IN AMERICA. By Robert Coles. Rutgers University Press. $7.50.

> . . . observation about us engenders the very opposite of what we seek: triviality, crassness and intellectual bankruptcy. And yet what we do see can in no way be excluded. Satire and flight are two possibilities . . . . But if one remain in a place and reject satire, what then? To be democratic, local (in the sense of being attached with integrity to actual experience) [we] must for sublety ascend to a place of almost abstract design to keep alive. To writing, then, as an art in itself. Yet what actually impinges on the senses must be rendered as it appears, by use of which, only, and under which, untouched, the significance has to be disclosed.
>
> — "The Work of Gertrude Stein"

Robert Coles is not a trained literary critic or scholar by vocation or avocation. It may be this salutary amateurism that has enabled him to write such a clear, intelligent book on Williams's fiction. Certainly, there has been a quickening in the amount of critical articles and books on Williams since his

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death, but Mr. Coles's book is a ray of light among them. This spate of critical attention on the part of the university cannot conceal the fact that it was not too many years ago that scholars—Americans among them—were heeding such drivel as:

> He has renounced all the pleasures of the English language, so that he is completely American; and he says only the dullest things, so he has won the terrible fight to become completely democratic as well.

William Empson wrote that. Is it the Voice from the Crypt, or a remark by a character in *Zuleika Dobson*? The implication that one writes badly if one is "completely American" is typical of a petrified intelligence that was at one time epidemic throughout academe—and note the phrase "says only the dullest things." After Williams spent over fifty years trying to show us all that what literature "says" is unimportant, is secondary, trivial. What work of Williams, in God's name, could Empson have read? When I was in college in 1950, a professor told me that Williams was one of the "younger Imagists." At the time he was 67, and had published 31 books.

Well, times change, and scholars have belatedly begun to attempt a critical understanding of this writer—there is at least displayed the awakening of curiosity among the tribe. It is encouraging. Some have done outstanding work: Kenner, Sister Bernetta, Louis Martz—there are a few others. But most seem to have taken their bearings from Randall Jarrell, who presents Williams as a notable curiosity, all heart, inspiration, and beer at the ball-game, or from Edmund Wilson, from whom—silence. By and large, critics of Williams are forever rummaging "between the lines" in a search for "meaning." Between Williams's lines there is nothing but space. All of his work has suffered from this sort of poverty of approach, but none more so than the fiction, particularly the Stecher trilogy, *White Mule, In the Money,* and *The Build-Up*. Delightfully, it is to this trilogy that Coles addresses the greater portion of his book. Wonderfully free of cant and hot air, Coles's study is a model of intelligent criticism, trusting completely the surface of Williams's work, his words.

I have written elsewhere that the Stecher trilogy is the best treatment of the immigrant success story in American letters, and I'm happy to see that in this opinion I have Mr. Coles as an ally. What is most heartening about Coles's study is that he has seen the work as a whole—he has not concentrated on the virtuoso performance given us in *White Mule*. To be sure, that book is an awesome description of the first years of life of the baby, Floss, but it shows more importantly, the beginning of the striving toward success of the Stecher family, success bought at the cost of a desolation so subtle as to be hardly

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graspable. It is Williams's triumph that he saw what success in America means, and to Coles's credit that he sees, with fine precision, Williams's painstaking attention to and accretion of details that make us realize finally that for the Stechers success is an alloy mixed of financial security, loss, destruction, and a nameless anomie, a desolation. Coles says:

> Williams was saying in his trilogy that no one can . . . ignore or forget the social and economic circumstances they face and once faced and always will face. Even triumph, he points out in *The Build-Up*, is an obsessive, almost maniacal denial of defeat—rather than a refuge or sanctuary finally obtained.

Everything in Williams's trilogy is plain—there is just enough information or dialogue given in order to make a scene come clear—it all looks simplistic, naive, "naturalistic." But in order to write of people who are not monsters, caricatures, or villains, there was no other way. It is the surface that Williams is concerned with, that surface in which he finds the "isolate flecks" that suddenly reveal the quality of an entire family, an entire community. Such an approach to writing begs to be misunderstood.

The satirist or socially relevant writer, the author of jeremiads must look at but one aspect of his subject, or invent an aspect that can be held up to ridicule or scorn, or assaulted. Williams chose another way, a way so plain, so candid that it is unbelievably subtle. "Tell them something else," he says in his *Autobiography*, other than the "lying habits of everyday speech and thought."

The Stechers are immigrant Americans, here to escape the misery and starvation that their parents and grandparents knew—as Coles points out, they came not *to* something, but *away from* something. In Coles's brilliant dissection of Gurlie's character he shows how Williams cleanly noted the particular American blend of love for this country's largesse for those who will work and struggle in the peculiarly amoral world of business, and hatred for the very thing that enables the family to become successful—that very business world's lying, cheating, and affable ruthlessness. Joe is a wealthy man at the end of the trilogy, but he has become, by the slowest of degrees, everything that he once loathed. But he doesn't really know it—his imagination, thwarted and all but destroyed, can find release only within the boundaries he himself has set up. He is a thorough success.

Williams, more than any other novelist that I can think of, wrote of things as they really are for the American middle class, not as what they "could be" if only—what? If only it were not America. If only this were not the middle class. If only they could "use the money" to buy beauty and culture. But this is the way that it happens. Nameless defeat. Williams

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understood absolutely the local—it was his laboratory, and for him enclosed the universal. What he has to tell us of this one family floods with light the entire American immigrant experience of this century. "A reply to Greek and Latin with the bare hands."

He saw it all, completely, these seeds of restlessness, discontent, desiccated morality. When Joe, at the conclusion of *The Build-Up*, his children gone, he and Gurlie alone and aging, with more money than they can ever possibly spend, shouts to nobody at all, to the sky, that he is going to build a mansion for Gurlie, "like nothing in the neighborhood," we know that this is not a cry of triumph but of pain, frustration: it is the dying imagination finding an outlet that is meaningless. It pierces the heart. There is no help for it, no help for Joe.

Coles is excellent on this confusion into which the Stechers slide. He sees that Williams does not mean for us to hate Joe and Gurlie, nor hold them in contempt. Why should we? They have worked for the rewards that the vast machine of American business manufactures, they have earned them. Sink or swim was the truth they saw as a young couple. They chose success rather than poverty. Yet Williams has no smeary sentimentalism in his work concerning the "good" poor and the "bad" middle class: at the core of his writing there is a nucleus of ice. He is, in his quiet and unsensational prose, utterly ruthless in his vision. There is nothing wonderful about the Stechers—but the poor are not wonderful either. Both wither emotionally and imaginatively. Coles remarks:

> Williams wants us to know that the Stechers were beginning to "make it" at a certain stage in their lives: they were "in the money." There is no great compliment intended thereby; Williams was not a starry-eyed apologist for American materialism. But if the Stechers are no Horatio Algers, or Andrew Carnegies, they are not shown to be decadent, mean, or vicious, either.

A twist here, a falsification there, a reading "between the lines" (which Williams resists tenaciously throughout the trilogy), could easily allow a reader to mark this work as no more than a movie with a happy ending, just as a lazy eye might see Van Gogh's picture of the two crows as a nature painting. But Williams does not allow this—all the information is given, everything is on the surface. It is placid, mundane, ordinary—and terrible.

Robert Coles has written of all this beautifully, in a plain and serviceable prose, and with a wit and energy that are remarkable. He has done a first-rate job with this book, which is, to date, one of the most valuable additions to the growing body of Williams criticism. Let us hope that it will lead readers to this neglected masterwork.

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Postscript: Years ago, when I was a boy, I passed each summer over the Jersey flats on my way to vacation in the western part of the state. The train on which I journeyed was the old Delaware Lackawanna and Western. The Passaic, over which the train passed was, one day, a fantastic rainbow of reds, yellows, purples, and pinks—breathtaking. The colors were, I learned, dyes from the chemical plants and silk mills along the river's banks. Though the waters seemed beautiful to my eye, the river was dead—poisoned by industrial wastes. The men who worked in those plants and the men who owned them were, I am sure, neither devils nor monsters. More than a few of them might have been a Joe Stecher. It is Williams's understanding that success in America presupposes loss and misery and destruction that makes his work so valuable, not only as a self-enclosed and isolated demonstration of his artistry, but as a diagram to show us exactly why America is as it is—not happy, not really sad, certainly not tragic, but desolate.

as if the earth under our feet
were
an excrement of some sky

and we degraded prisoners
destined
to hunger until we eat filth

while the imagination strains
after deer
going by fields of goldenrod in

the stifling heat of September
Somehow
it seems to destroy us

Gilbert Sorrentino

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PR

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INTERPRETATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION

S/Z. By Roland Barthes. Translated by Richard Miller with an Introduction by Richard Howard. Hill & Wang. $8.95.

In 1946, Erich Auerbach published *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*; two years later, in *Studies in European Realism*, Georg Lukacs gathered up some of the essays he had written during the '30's as a refugee in Moscow from fascist Central Europe. Balzac was always Lukacs's great example of French realism, and for Auerbach too, he played a decisive role in the emergence of a literary technique—the "mixed style"—capable of representing everyday reality in its problematic, existential, and tragic seriousness. Now comes Roland Barthes's *S/Z*, first published in 1970, here translated by Richard Miller (with trifling exceptions, well and faithfully). Barthes's essay sweeps aside the exploration of realism and aims to capture Balzac—even Balzac—for a new critical discourse. Barthes rejects what he calls the "readerly," the passive consumption of old-fashioned stories written according to an ideology of representation. Instead, reading must become "writerly," an active process that rewrites the text.

Barthes's theory takes flight from Balzac's short narrative *Sarrasine*. The story opens with the narrator musing at a ball given in Paris by the Lanty family, the origin of whose wealth is shrouded in mystery. The Marquise de Rochefide has accompanied the narrator to the party; her curiosity is aroused first by a horribly decrepit old man, who lives in seclusion with the Lantys and seems to be some relation, and then by a painting of a stunningly beautiful Adonis. In exchange for a night of lovemaking, the narrator offers to tell the story behind the painting, a story which will at the same time reveal the identity of the old man and the source of the family fortune. The next evening at the Marquise's, he relates the history of Sarrasine, a young student of Bouchardon, who travels to Rome to study sculpture, immediately falls in love with a singer, La Zambinella, and makes a statue of her even before their first meeting. Sarrasine finds she is protected by Cardinal Cicognara and decides to abduct her and persuade her to marry him. On the evening of the planned kidnapping, he is told that La Zambinella is in fact a castrato. Stunned, he carries through his plan in order to learn the truth. La Zambinella admits he has deceived the sculptor to amuse his friends. Sarrasine's reproaches threaten to end in violence, but assassins hired by the Cardinal arrive in time to rescue the castrato and kill Sarrasine. The Cardinal also seizes the statue and years later, when the castrato has become an immensely rich star, the Lanty family

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has it copied, transforming the female statue into Adonis. This tale so disgusts the Marquise that she breaks her bargain with the narrator and resolves on a life of Christian virtue, which resolution, it is obvious to the reader, will never last.

To read this text in a "writerly" way, Barthes first eliminates its illusory unity or integrity. He "stars" the text into 561 "lexias," fragments which he reads according to five "codes": the hermeneutic is the text's pattern of puzzle and suspense; the semic, its pattern of "characters"; the symbolic projects rhetorical patterns into large structures; the proairetic produces plot; and the reference or cultural code is thematic and didactic. Interspersed among these lexias and their analyses according to codes are 93 brief essays, whose very digressiveness further separates the text from any ideology of unity or totality. The critical and "writerly" reading of the text provides a playful, ludic advantage, that is, it multiplies possible meanings and does not try to reach any ultimate, determinate, univocal meaning behind or beyond the text's surface. Criticism is to the text as the text is to reality: the object in both cases is a "citation," an "already written," not a brute "thing," but a "meaning" which is transcribed or rewritten within a new system of meanings.

Barthes opposes the "writerly" value in texts to the "readerly," which tries to build closed, univocal structures by accumulating significant elements of the text into unities. These structures fit together and reinforce each other, all united under a comprehensive "law" of the textual system's structure. The ancient model for such an analysis is Aristotle's *Poetics*, along with its archetypical example, *Oedipus*. The modern example is the formalist and rhetorical analysis of "organic unity." This "readerly" analysis, Barthes asserts, is an authoritarian intimidation which wants to silence the indeterminable plurality of the "writerly." Holistic criticism turns the text into a fetish. The Aristotelian logic which tries to gather signifying elements of a text into the large unities of class and category may, Barthes hopes, "provoke the nausea brought on by any appropriative violence."

A number of objections may occur to a reader who has not been swept along by Barthes's rhetoric or simply terrorized by his scorn for the bourgeois ideologues of realism. If we patiently examine his assertions with an independent mind, they frequently break down. For example, Barthes asserts that discourse can present action three ways: simply namė an action and state its meaning; or describe the action and its meaning in detail; or describe the action while leaving meaning unstated. Barthes goes on, "The first two realms, in terms of which signification is *excessively* named, impose a dense plenitude of meaning or, if one prefers, a certain redundancy, a kind of semantic prattle typical of the archaic—or infantile—era of modern discourse,

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marked by the excessive fear of failing to communicate meaning (its basis); whence, in reaction, in our latest—or 'new'—novels, the practice of the third system: to state the event without accompanying it with its signification." "Excessive" is presumably a technical term, but what about "excessive fear"? Is there an *un*excessive fear? "If one prefers"—and if one doesn't? "A kind of"—categorical subdivision or mere vagueness? "Archaic—or infantile"—are they really the same or is this gratuitous insult (or worse, exhibitionistic erudition, here an allusion to Foucault and Freud, with a slippery and slipshod equating of the two)? "Communicate meaning (or its basis)"—well, which, meaning or basis? "In reaction"—is it really, or is the "historical" development here merely a pseudo-development determined by the discourse's presumptions that its alternatives are exhaustive and that they stand in a relation of "reaction" to each other, that no other "causes" need be sought? The strange technical vocabulary (never defined or fully established) combines with a shifty syntax and rhetoric to produce a hallucinatory trance; in the reader's bedazzled confusion, the flat assertion of the final clause emerges with the force of a brilliant discovery, instead of a banality spruced up by a glossy discourse. As Susan Sontag remarks, Barthes is an "elegant" critic. Though she means to praise, the only deadlier insult, by Barthes's own lights, would be the accusation of clarity (no one is likely to make it). Barthes never justifies his language or its presuppositions; it becomes a whirling vortex that sucks the reader in and under.

This smooth style covers some very eclectic tracks. The language is a pastiche of—among others—Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and through them of Freud and Nietzsche. Barthes's way of talking is in fact commonplace among up-to-the-minute French intellectuals. It constitutes an as yet nameless movement, the festive fun at structuralism's wake. To draw on other thinkers is unobjectionable—what else does anyone ever do? But in Barthes, the new terms function like that reference code which he finds "nauseating": they are not explored, tested, established, but merely put into play, treated as a received wisdom, an accumulated intellectual capital. It is the critical equivalent of sentimentalism: an appeal in bad faith to formulaic notions (as sentimentalism appeals to formulaic feelings) without the thought (or experience) that would authorize them. By cutting off the problematic and polemic origins of its terms, the style flattens them out. Is Derrida at pains to show that Saussure's thought is internally contradictory? Do he and Lacan disagree utterly on fundamental issues? No matter. Saussure, Jakobson, Bataille, Derrida, Lacan—here comes everybody to sit down to tea and a polite if rather shallow *causerie*. So debilitating is this elegance that Barthes can never quite get at his own central terms. Are some texts "readerly" and others "writerly"? Is the distinction categorical or historical

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(the change dated variously at 1848, Flaubert, Lautréamont, Mallarmé)? Or are these textual functions, so that all texts are both "writerly" and "readerly"? (Or perhaps all texts are "writerly" but some are—or pretend to be?—"readerly" too—or instead?) Or are these ways of approaching texts different ways of reading? Are the two mutually exclusive? Interdependent? Dialectically connected? (Barthes would presumably dislike "dialectic," hinting as it does at a Hegelian synthesizing totality.) It is as though from a debate in several languages someone transcribed only snippets of each speaker filtered through the neutralizing medium of a simultaneous translation. Again, the fault here is not borrowing, not "eclecticism." It is premature synthesis, the too hasty move from a still-developing speculation to an applied technology.

These objections may seem harsh. It is only fair to concede that to deal successfully with the difficult issues now facing critical theory, a critic will need exceptional philosophical talents along with literary experience. And Barthes's eminence—founded on a dozen books, half of them available in English—is secure enough to bear a rigorous testing of the limits of his positions. More important, these objections are small change. The real question is not whether Barthes does his work well or not, but whether the whole enterprise makes sense. I think it does not, and I think the trouble lies in that key idea which meant so much to Auerbach and Lukacs and is so despicable to Barthes: "representation."

The attack on "representation" is quite widespread in contemporary French thought. Ultimately, the critique is political, and presumably "Marxist" (though very strangely so): Derrida's analysis of Rousseau in *De la grammatologie*, for instance, subtly corrodes the theoretical bases of "representational democracy." Yet within literary theory, this attack is at its heart entirely consonant with a formalist problematic. Barthes distinguishes a "pure" or "idyllic" communication—that of mathematics, logic, the formalized sciences—from "impure" communication, the "noisiness" of writing, either limited, as in the "readerly," or "massive, unnameable," as in the "writerly." This antithesis is an old friend: practical vs. poetic language (Russian formalism); referential vs. emotive statement (I.A. Richards); scientific-conceptual vs. dramatic-metaphoric language (Cleanth Brooks); logical vs. counterlogical style (W.K. Wimsatt). For Barthes, narrative—and "writing" more generally—has references, but no referents: there is no "reality" to which the text can innocently and transparently correspond. Similarly, critical "writing" cannot give innocent access to a preexisting text. Criticism either seeks conceptual power over texts—a sterile, pseudoscientific classification of "structures"; or it seeks the narcissistic pleasure of rewriting the text in a "structuration," which accepts the perverse complexities of "reading" and "interpretation." That is, criticism must choose between a

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Gradgrindean and calculating utilitarianism and an unmediated leap into a left-wing utopia. If criticism seeks to represent or know a literary work, it becomes a mere exercise of authoritarian power, imprisoning the object in a specular image. It must instead be "nonrepresentational," must become itself the "writerly" discourse Barthes yearns for.

Lukacs long ago analyzed this curious combination of a crude positivism with a solipsistic idealism (the essays are reprinted in *Writer and Critic*). In philosophical terms, current French thought has discovered Nietzsche and stuck there. But later thinkers as diverse as Whitehead, Heidegger, and Polanyi have all carried philosophical investigation onto quite different ground. Within literary criticism, as Lukacs argues, the answer to the false dichotomy posed by formalism and its "radical" critique is to recall—yet again—that by "imitation" Aristotle never meant "photographic realism." "Representation" in literature moves dialectically from reality—that is, from the essential forces determining existing social conditions—to the representation of reality through form, through those compositional principles which *are* the author's "ideology"; and thence back to reality through "practice," through the "tendentious humanism" which, in Lukacs's analysis, connects great literature with the dynamic, evolving forces in concrete reality. Neither reality nor its representation in thought and literature is a static, fixed structure. Both terms and their interrelations unfold dialectically. Lukacs's criticism grasps this dialectic process as a totality without falling into a naive positivism or a formalistic idealism. "Representation" is dynamic, dialectic, and finally critical. *Sarrasine* protests tendentiously and humanistically against the mutilating reduction of artistic and all other human relations—of human beings themselves—to commodity terms, a reduction against which the narrator and the woman he tells his story to are equally powerless. Barthes's halfhearted economic allusions, further vitiated by the attempt to cram Saussure and Derrida down Marx's throat, are simply inadequate to penetrate to the social relations which lie behind Balzac's narrative and behind literature itself. For that, we would need to draw on Lukacs, on Walter Benjamin, and on the heritage of the Frankfurt School and "critical philosophy." After half a century, these great thinkers are still grossly neglected, and at a time when mere eccentricities from Paris are followed with the closest attention and touted everywhere. This essentially Marxist tradition could restore to criticism its proper task, which is to develop flexible and precise intellectual resources to analyze literature's power to represent the conditions of our existence, that is, to interpret them and, through interpreting, help us change them.

Donald Marshall

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WRITERS' CHOICE

EDITORS' NOTE: Writers' Choice *is a new department of short comments on old as well as new books that our contributors like particularly and want to call attention to.*

GILBERT SORRENTINO: *The Embodiment of Knowledge* by William Carlos Williams. (New Directions, 1974.) A collection of fragments, jottings, notes, and essays written by Williams during the period 1928-1930, and discovered in manuscript in his archive at the Beinicke Library at Yale, this volume is continually enthralling and fascinating. It is especially useful to the student of Williams, since it prefigures many of his later concepts of poetics and the American language as a vehicle for the literary artist. A wonderful complement to the *Selected Essays* and *In The American Grain*, the book is an unexpected gift from a great poet. . . . *Sheeper* by Irving Rosenthal. (Grove, 1967.) Out of print now for some five years, *Sheeper* is Mr. Rosenthal's lapidary account of the Beat movement in New York during the fifties and early sixties. A brilliantly styled, episodic novel about a socioliterary movement that has been officially misunderstood and maligned, its only comparison must be looked for in the unique prose of Lautréamont and Gérard de Nerval. There is, to my mind, no American novelist writing today with Rosenthal's exquisite sense of style. . . . *The Poor Mouth* by Flann O'Brien. (Viking, 1974.) If there was anything more needed to assure Flann O'Brien's position as one of possibly three great comic writers of this century, *The Poor Mouth* is it. A bitter yet hilarious satire of Irish country life, the novel has about it the same aura of comedy combined with malevolence that O'Brien created in *The Third Policeman*. Translated from the Gaelic by Ralph Steadman, the book is supposed to be even funnier in the original, but I can't imagine how.

STEPHEN KOCH: *Cheri* and *The Last of Cheri*, followed by *The Vagabond*, followed, I'd suppose, by Colette's *oeuvres complètes*. The world seems to be rediscovering Colette. I should probably blush to confess that my own discovery of her has been postponed until only this summer—but the discovery is too splendid and exciting for any such nonsense. What's more, I know I am not alone in my ignorance: Colette has been too long among the enshrined unreads. High culture's classy old grandmother surrounded by her cats—it has been all too easy to pass over the creature at the center

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of the cult. A word to fellow latecomers: One discovers a simply amazing and original intelligence, and a writer's writer who speaks to everyone, speaking especially of real sex and real desire with an *accuracy* that seems at times preternatural. An observation and a question concerning sexism: Any writer can, and probably should, learn from Colette. Why then does one feel so strongly that a man foolish enough to try writing *like* Colette would inevitably be what she is not: precious? *Still Life*, by Sanford Friedman (E.P. Dutton, 1975). Two novellas, both very remarkable, but the first particularly possessed by a fierce density of encounter with unmanageable emotion that makes the language almost like a physical presence impinging on the mind. It is very rare to feel absolutely driven through the pages of a work as complex as this. One can't help resorting to the reviewer's word—*Still Life* is compelling: a singularly intelligent study of compulsion, and it compels.

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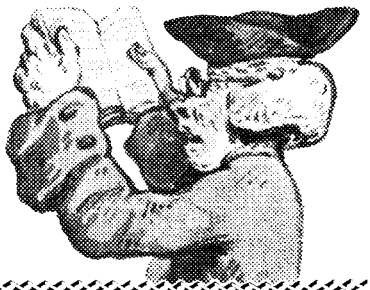

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LETTERS

SOLZHENITSYN

PR:

Since *Partisan Review*'s founding in 1934, it has provided its readers with provocative articles and thoughtful comments on the contemporary world. Because of the great esteem with which your magazine is held in the American intellectual community, I feel compelled to correct a few inaccuracies concerning Alexander Solzhenitsyn's ideas that appeared in Vadim Belotserkovsky's "Soviet Dissenters: Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, and Medvedev" (*PR*, 1/1975).

Mr. Belotserkovsky states that Solzhenitsyn "proposes the curtailment of economic development instead of the *restructuring* of its inner character," and that "it would seem that out of his disgust with Marxism Solzhenitsyn rejects not only materialism but, actually, a scientific approach to social and economic problems." One can't help but wonder if the author of these lines has ever read Solzhenitsyn, much less studied his *Letter To The Soviet Leaders*, in which Solzhenitsyn reveals his solutions to the social cul-de-sac facing the Soviet Union.

In his *Letter* Solzhenitsyn calls not for the rejection of science but for its very opposite, the utilization of technical knowledge so as to "rationalize" the manifestly irrational economic and cultural development of Russia. Nowhere does he so explicitly adopt this position than in relation to the future path of developing the Russian northeast:

> And herein lies Russia's hope for winning time and winning salvation: In our vast northeastern spaces, which over four centuries our sluggishness has prevented us from mutilating by our mistakes, we can build anew: not the senseless, voracious civilization of "progress"—no; we can set up a stable economy without pain or delay and settle people there for the first time according to the needs and principles of that economy.

Philip Rahv has even gone so far in *The New York Review of Books* as to say that Solzhenitsyn advocates a kind of technocracy in modern society.

Solzhenitsyn rounds off his *Letter* by asking the Soviet government to give the Russian people "a free art and literature, the free publication not just of political books—God preserve us!—and exhortations and election leaflets; allow us philosophical, ethical, economic and social studies, and you will see what a rich harvest it brings and how it bears fruit—for the good of Russia." How does Mr. Belotserkovsky respond to such a modest suggestion? In his article he writes, "And if the leadership had accepted Solzhenitsyn's proposals, the actual result would have been the temporary strengthening of the regime—so that life in Russia would

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have become even more unendurable." Ah! So now we know that because Solzhenitsyn demands spiritual and intellectual liberties, he is in fact helping the omnipotent state strangle the soul of his nation even more. Mr. Belotserkovsky has effectively squared the circle and called it a triangle in the very same breath.

I hope that in the future *Partisan Review* will publish a perceptive critique of Mr. Solzhenitsyn's highly stimulating thoughts, if not a piece by the author himself. In the past his ideas have unfortunately been distorted to the point of ludicrousness—a fact he has commented upon many times.

Terry Copple, Moscow, Idaho

Mr. Belotserkovsky replies:

Terry Copple writes that I accuse Solzhenitsyn of being against science. But even in the passage quoted from my article, what is said is something quite different; namely that Solzhenitsyn and his sympathizers reject the scientific *approach to social and economic problems*. I see this, for instance, in the fact that Solzhenitsyn confuses Marxist *ideology*, which—however one regards it—is not practised by the CPSU, with the Marxist *phraseology* which the CPSU does employ. I also see this in the fact that Solzhenitsyn hopes that a renunciation of this phraseology without any serious change in the socio-economic structure and without any democratization will be capable of radically altering life in Russia. Academician Andrei Sakharov has criticized Solzhenitsyn on the same points.

Terry Copple also distorts the conclusion to which I come in my article. The words quoted (about the danger of Solzhenitsyn's ideas and proposals) are concerned not with his request for freedom in literature and art (which, I believe, impossible without political freedom) but with his main idea for replacing "Marxism" with nationalism and Orthodox religion, while *retaining authoritarian rule*. This dream which Solzhenitsyn cherishes for Russia is also considered extremely dangerous by Academician Sakharov, by Mihajlo Mihailov (who has called Solzhenitsyn's ideas both anti-Russian and anti-Christian, writing in *Novoe russkoe slovo* and *Posev*, 1974), by Levitin-Krasnov, the religious writer (in *Zemlya dybom* [*The World on End*], *samizdat*, 1974), and by many others.

Terry Copple may not be in agreement with this, but, there again, one does not need to distort the meaning of our polemic and wantonly manipulate quotations.

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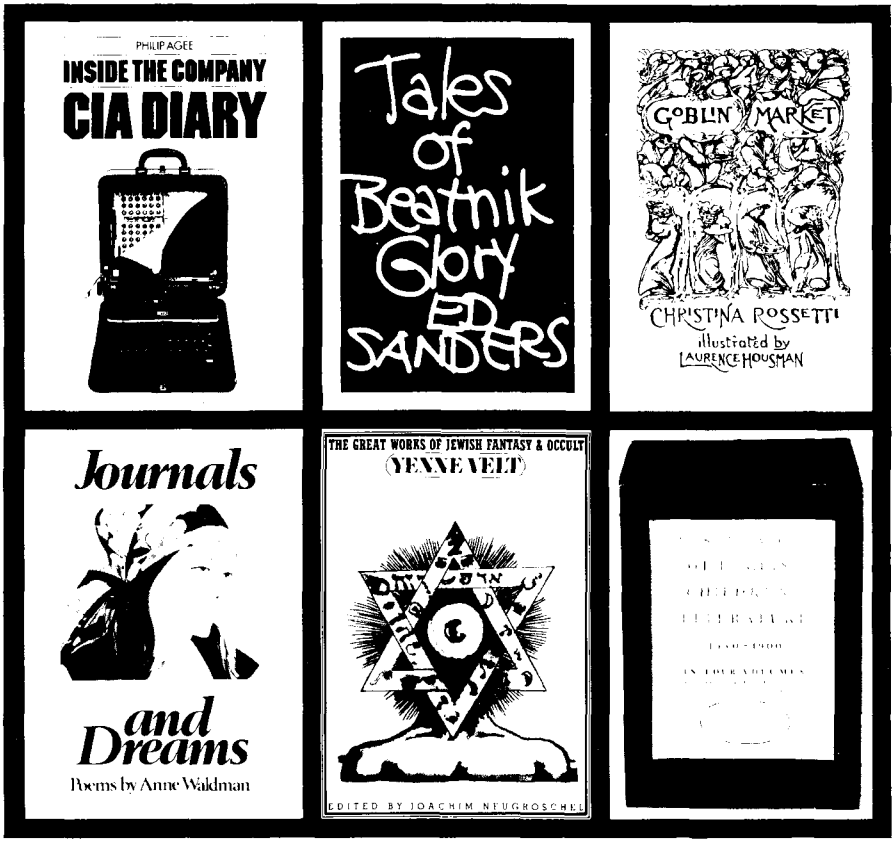

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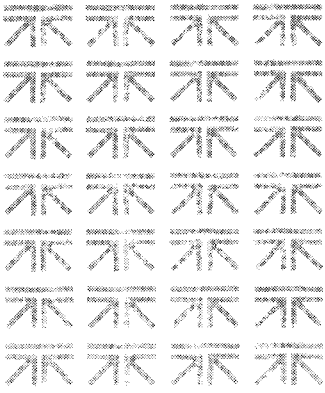

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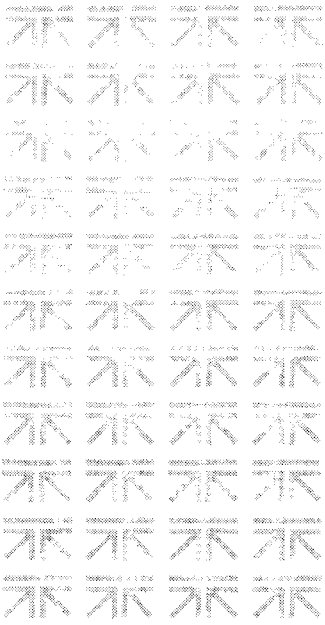

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